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GANDHI SERIES

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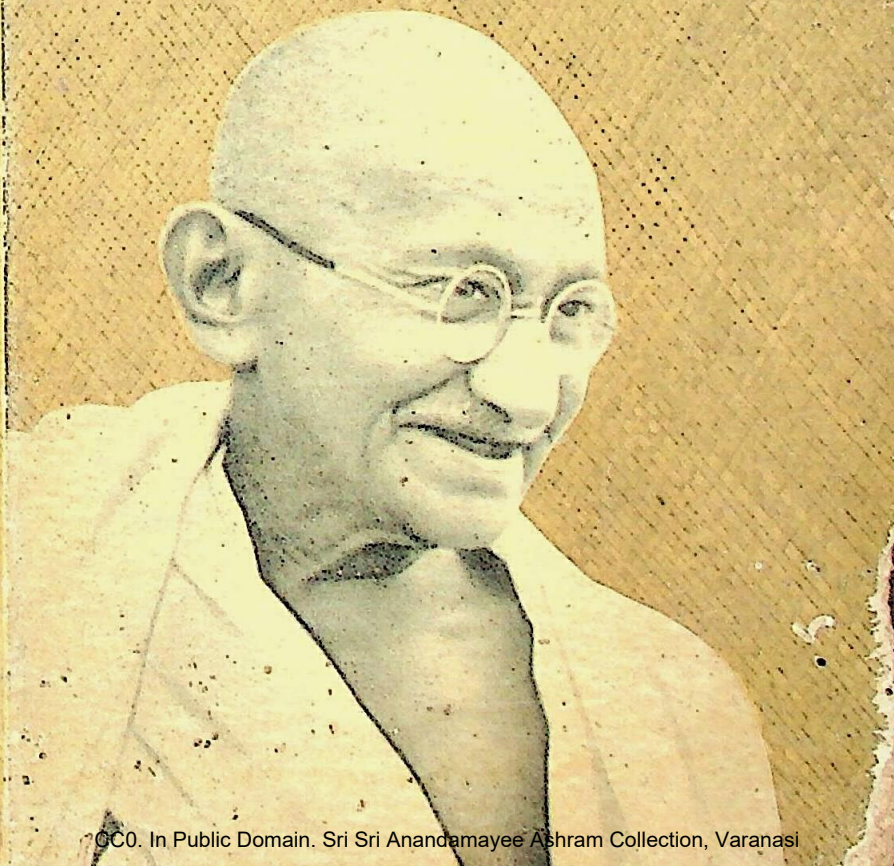
VOL. IV

ALL RELIGIONS ARE TRUE

M. K. GANDHI



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"GANDHI SERIES" No. 4

ALL RELIGIONS ARE TRUE

By

M. K. GANDHI

EDITED & PUBLISHED

By

ANAND T. HINGORANI

1962

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PREFACE

THIS collection deals with Gandhiji's views on the fundamental unity and equality of religions, the brotherhood of man, and the true nature and purpose of religion. According to Gandhiji, all the great religions of the world — Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, etc. — are true more or less. "More or less" because religion, as conceived by man, can never be perfect even as man, being man, can never be perfect, perfection being the exclusive attribute of God alone. And so, says Gandhiji, "if all faiths outlined by man are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error."

No one, however, has a monopoly of Truth. As Henry Polak has observed, "it is inherently unlikely that any people has received at any one time or through any one Teacher all the Truth. Truth is like the fire at the heart of a many-faced jewel. Each angle shows a different aspect and a different colour." Imperfect humans that we are, we can see Truth only in fragments and act according to our limited lights. The reality is known only to God. As such, Gandhiji enjoins upon us the duty of being humble and tolerant. "We must not," he says, "like the frog in the well, who imagines that the universe ends with the walls surrounding his well, think that our religion alone represents the whole Truth, and all the others are false. A reverent study of the other religions of the world would show that they are equally true as our own, though all are necessarily imperfect." One must, therefore, he urges, "entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as one accords to one's own. When such tolerance becomes a law of life, conflict between different faiths

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becomes impossible, and so does all effort to convert other people to one's faith."

Gandhiji held strong views on the matter of conversion. Conversion he regarded as essentially a matter of heart and reason, to which an appeal could be made only through one's conduct and character, and never through force or fraud or material inducement. "What is the use of crossing from one compartment to another," he asks, "if it does not mean a moral rise?" Religion for him is purely a personal matter and certainly not something which can admit of a change like one's clothes. He simply cannot imagine that "a man will become good or attain salvation only if he embraces a particular religion — Hinduism, Christianity or Islam." For, purity of character and salvation depend, according to him, entirely upon the purity of one's heart.

Gandhiji looked upon different religions as so many beautiful flowers from the same garden or branches of the same majestic tree. "Just as a tree has many branches but one root, similarly the various religions are the leaves and branches of the same tree. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are the main branches; but as for varieties of religion, they are as numerous as mankind." Again, using the same simile, he says: "Just as a tree has a million leaves, similarly though God is one, there are as many religions as there are men and women though they are rooted in one God.... Each mind has a different conception of God from that of the other." He, however, did not aim at any fusion of religions, for each religion, he felt, had a special contribution to make to human evolution. Each religion, in his view, was distinct from the other though having the same source. And because all religions are one at source that he invariably emphasiz-

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ed the need of synthesizing them, and in his own person presented the wonderful synthesis of natural and revealed Truth.

Though he believed in the absolute oneness of God and, therefore, of humanity, nevertheless, he did not envisage a time when there would be one religion in practice though, he said, it was possible to conceive of one religion in theory since there is one God. True religion he regarded as a universal belief in the one and only God. And this belief in one God, he held to be the corner-stone of all religions. "We are all children of the same Father whom the Hindu, the Mussalman and the Christian know by different names.... The *Allah* of the Islam is the same as the God of Christians and the *Ishwara* of Hindus.... The names do not indicate individuality, but attributes, and little man has tried in his humble way to describe Mighty God by giving Him attributes, though He is above all attributes, Indescribable, Inconceivable, Immeasurable. Living faith in this God means acceptance of the brotherhood of mankind. It also means equal respect for all religions."

Gandhiji, however, clearly saw the time coming "when people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own." It was merely a question of finding unity in diversity. Just as in Nature there is a fundamental unity running through all the seeming diversity, so also in religions there is a fundamental unity which one has to recognize and realize. In order to discover this underlying unity among all religions, Gandhiji had with him a master-key – the master-key of Truth and Non-violence. "When I unlock the chest of religion with this master-key", he says, "I do not find it difficult to discover its likeness with other religions. When you look at these religions as so many

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upon us without any discrimination. The seasons of the year also bring joys and sorrows in their wake to us all in a common measure. Above all, the same Life Spirit pervades us all. This only proves that the whole of humanity is one and that it cannot be differentiated. That being so, may we not justly shout with joy and say that just as all men are brothers, so are all religions true?

ANAND T. HINGORANI

7, Edmonstone Road,
Allahabad.

18th Sept. 1961

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CHAPTER I

EQUALITY OF RELIGIONS

Necessity of Equimindedness

WHEN I was turning over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my purpose with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these texts, I can say, I was equiminded towards all these faiths, although perhaps I was not then conscious of it. Refreshing my memory of those days, I do not find I ever had the slightest desire to criticize any of those religions merely because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence and found the same fundamental morality in each. Some things I did not understand then, and do not understand even now, but experience has taught me that it is a mistake hastily to imagine that anything that we cannot understand is necessarily wrong. Some things, which I did not understand first, have since become as clear as daylight. Equimindedness helps us to solve many difficulties and even when we criticize anything, we express ourselves with a humility and a courtesy which leave no sting behind them.

The acceptance of the doctrine of Equality of Religions does not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. That being so, some people might object that there would be no room left for equimindedness, if everyone took his own decision as to what was religion and what was irreligion. If we follow the Law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him, and, therefore, either we shall bring him to see the

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error of his ways, or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the Law of Love, he may be violent to us. If, however, we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person.[1]

Revelation of Truth

AHIMSA teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. This admission will be readily made by a seeker of Truth, who follows the Law of Love. If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but would have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our imperfection. And if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect. We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and re-interpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And, if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faiths also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we

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would not only hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.[2]

As a matter of fact, while we adhere to our own faith, we have every right to adopt acceptable features from any other faith. It is not only a right; it is a duty we must discharge. It is fanaticism to imagine that you cannot accept anything from other faiths.[3]

The question then arises: Why should there be so many different faiths? The Soul is one, but the bodies which She animates are many. We cannot reduce the number of bodies: yet we recognize the unity of the Soul. Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so is there one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium. The one Religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose interpretation is to be held to be the right one? Everybody is right from his own stand-point, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the North Pole from the South. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to us a truer understanding of our own.

Tolerance obviously does not disturb the distinction between right and wrong or good and evil. The reference here throughout is naturally to the principal faiths of the world. They are all based on common fundamentals. They have all produced great sairts.[4]

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All Religions Are True

THE principal faiths of the world constitute a revelation of Truth; but as they have all been outlined by imperfect man, they have been affected by imperfections and alloyed with untruth. One must, therefore, entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as one accords to one's own. Where such tolerance becomes a law of life, conflict between different faiths becomes impossible, and so does all effort to convert other people to one's own faith. One can only pray that the defects in the various faiths may be overcome, and that they may advance, side by side, towards perfection.[5]

For me, all the principle religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity.[6]

I believe that all the great religions of the world are true, more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything that the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I, therefore, admit, in all humility, that even the *Vedas*, the *Quran* and the *Bible* are the imperfect word of God; and imperfect beings that we are, swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fulness.

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that,

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if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the stand-point of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.

Since my youth upward, it has been a humble but persistent effort on my part to understand the truth of all the religions of the world, and adopt and assimilate in my own thought, word, and deed all that I have found to be best in those religions. The faith that I profess not only permits me to do so, but renders it obligatory for me to take the best from whatsoever source it may come.[7]

True Religion is One

PROF. KRIZENSKI: Catholicism, according to me, is the only true religion, and the only spiritual force. As a professor of philosophy, I have studied all the religious systems of the world and have come to this deliberate conclusion.

Gandhiji: Do you, therefore, say that other religions are untrue?

Prof. Krizenski: If others are convinced that their religions are true, they are saved.

Gandhiji: Therefore, you will say that everyone would be saved even through untruth. For, you say that if a man really and sincerely believes in what is, as a matter of fact, untruth, he is saved. Would you not also hold, therefore, that your own way may be untrue but that you are convinced that it is true and, therefore, you will be saved?

Prof. Krizenski: But I have studied all religions and have found that mine is the only true religion.

Gandhiji: But so have others studied other religions. What about them? Well, I go further and tell you that

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Religion is one and it has several branches which are all equal.

Prof. Krizenski: I accept that no religion lacks Divine inspiration, but all have not the same truth because all have not the same light.

Gandhiji: It is an essentially untrue position to take for a seeker after Truth, that he alone is in absolute possession of Truth. What is happening to the poor astronomers today? They are changing their position every day, and there are scientists who impeach even Einstein's latest theory.

Prof. Krizenski: No. But I have examined the arguments in favour of other religions.

Gandhiji: But it is an intellectual examination. You require different scales to weigh spiritual truths. Either we are all untrue—quite a logical position to take,—but since Truth does not come out of untruth, it is better to say that we all have truth but not the complete Truth. For, God reveals His truth to instruments that are imperfect. Rain-drops of purest distilled water become diluted or polluted as soon as they come in contact with Mother Earth. My submission is that your position is arrogant. But I suggest to you a better position. Accept all religions as equal, for all have the same root and the same laws of growth.

Prof. Krizenski: It is necessary to examine every religion philosophically and find out which is more harmonius, more perfect.

Gandhiji: That presupposes that all religions are in watertight compartments. That is wrong. They are always growing. Let us not limit God's function. He may reveal Himself in a thousand ways and a thousand times.

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Prof. Krizenski: But I have a great respect for your religion.

Gandhiji: Not enough. I had that feeling myself one day, but I found that it was not enough. Unless I accept the position that all religions are equal, and I have as much regard for other religions as I have for my own, I would not be able to live in the boiling war around me. Any make-believe combination of spiritual forces is doomed to failure if this fundamental position is not accepted. I read and get all my inspiration from the *Gita*. But I also read the *Bible* and the *Quran* to enrich my own religion. I incorporate all that is good in other religions.

Prof. Krizenski: That is your goodwill.

Gandhiji: That is not enough.

Prof. Krizenski: But I have great respect for you.

Gandhiji: Not enough. If I were to join the Catholic Church, you would have greater respect for me.

Prof. Krizenski: Oh yes. If you become a Catholic, you would be as great as St. Francis.

Gandhiji: But not otherwise? A Hindu cannot be a St. Francis? Poor Hindu.[8]

Branches of the Same Tree

I BELIEVE in *Sarvadharmasamanatva*—having equal regard for all faiths and creeds.... Equal regard does not mean that you should adopt the other view, as my equal respect for Islam or Christianity does not mean that I would adopt either of the two. My equal regard compels me to understand their viewpoint, to appreciate the light in which they look upon their religion. It means that we should emphasize points of agreement and not make much of the points of difference.[9]

I do maintain that mutual respect for one another's

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religions is inherent in a peaceful society. Free impact of ideas is impossible on any other condition. Religions are meant to tame our savage nature, not to let it loose. God is only one, though He has countless names. Don't you expect me to respect your faith? If you do, may I not expect the same respect from you for mine? In spite of separatism, the world is moving towards Universal Brotherhood when mankind will be one nation. Neither you nor I can stop the march towards our common destiny.[10]

For me, the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore, they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect.[11]

It is a travesty of true religion to consider one's own religion as superior and other's as inferior. All religions enjoin worship of the One God who is all-pervasive. He is present even in a droplet of water or in a tiny speck of dust. Even those who worship idols, worship not the stone of which they are made; they try to see God who resides in them. Various religions are like the leaves on a tree. No two leaves are alike, yet there is no antagonism between them or between the branches on which they grow. Even so, there is an underlying unity in the variety which we see in God's creation.[12]

Just as a tree has many branches but one root, similarly the various religions are the leaves and branches of the same tree. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are the main branches; but as for varieties of religion, they are as numerous as mankind.[13]

I do not aim at any fusion. Each religion has its own contribution to make to human evolution. I regard the great faiths of the world as so many branches of a tree,

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each distinct from the other though having the same source.[14]

If all religions are one at source, we have to synthesize them. Today, they are looked upon as separate and that is why we kill each other. When we are tired of religion, we become atheists and then, apart from the little self, nothing, not even God, exists. But when we acquire true understanding, the little self perishes and God becomes all in all.[15]

Children of the Same God

WE are all children of the same Father – whom the Hindu and the Mussalman and the Christian know by different names. What if Shankara declared his faith in one God in his formula *Ekamevadvitiyam*, or Ramanuja in his dual doctrine or Mohammed in his *La Ilaha Illillaha*? All meant one and the same thing.[16]

True religion is a universal belief in the one and only God. The world is fast growing out of dogmas and creeds, which have so sickened it that it has become confused and has begun to deny the very existence of the Maker. Happily, that stage of negation is quickly passing and enlightened faith in the Supreme Maker of the Universe is taking its place.[17]

Q. If there is only one God, should there not be only one religion?

A. This is a strange question. Just as a tree has a million leaves, similarly though God is one, there are as many religions as there are men and women though they are rooted in one God. We do not see this plain truth because we are followers of different prophets and claim as many religions as there are prophets. As a matter of fact, whilst I believe myself to be a Hindu, I know that I do not worship God in the same manner as one or all of them.

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Religion is purely a personal matter. There are in reality as many religions as minds. Each mind has a different conception of God from that of the other.[18]

Belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions. But I can clearly see the time coming when people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. I think that we have to find unity in diversity. We are all children of one and the same God and, therefore, absolutely equal.[19]

In Nature, there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are no exception to the natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity.[20]

I claim that all religions are equal. We ought to cultivate the same regard for other religions that we have for our own. Not to do so is to belittle one's own faith and expose it to attacks from without.[21]

All Religions Are Equal

MR. KEITHAN: I would say it is no use comparing religions. They are different ways. Do you think we can explain the thing in different terms?

Gandhiji: You are right when you say that it is impossible to compare them. But the deduction from it is that they are equal. All men are born free and equal, but one is much stronger or weaker than another physi-

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cally and mentally. Therefore, superficially, there is no equality between the two. But there is an essential equality. In our nakedness, God is not going to think of me as Gandhi and you as Keithan. And what are we in this mighty Universe? We are less than atoms, and as between atoms there is no use asking which is smaller and which is higher. Inherently, we are equal. The differences of race and skin and of mind and body and of climate and nation are transitory. In the same way, essentially all religions are equal. If you read the *Quran*, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim; if you read the *Bible*, you must read it with the eye of the Christian; if you read the *Gita*, you must read it with the eye of a Hindu. Where is the use of scanning details and then holding up a religion to ridicule? Take the very first chapter of *Genesis* or of *Matthew*. We read a long pedigree and then at the end we are told Jesus was born of a virgin. You come up against a blind wall. But I must read it all with the eye of a Christian.

Mr. Keithan: Then, even in our *Bible*, there is the question of Moses and Jesus. We must hold them to be equal?

Gandhiji: Yes. All prophets are equal. It is a horizontal plain.

Mr. Keithan: If we think in terms of Einstein's Relativity, all are equal. But I cannot happily express the equality.

Gandhiji: That is why I say they are equally true and equally imperfect. The finer the line you draw, the nearer it approaches Euclid's true straight line, but it never is the true straight line. The tree of Religion is the same; there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branches must not gloat over it and say: 'Mine

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is the superior one.' None is superior, none is inferior to the other.[22]

Plea for Mutual Toleration

I HAVE begun to believe in toleration which I would call the equality of all religions. Jesus Chirst may be looked upon as belonging to Christians only, but he really does not belong to any community, inasmuch as the lessons that Jesus Christ gave belong to the whole world.[23]

Truth is the same in all religions, though through refraction it appears for the time being variegated even as light does through a prism.[24]

This Truth resolves itself into its component parts Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc. For, Truth will appear to most sincere and conscientious Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity respectively *as they believe them.*

The golden rule of conduct, therefore, is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and that we shall always see *Truth* in fragment and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody else's freedom of conscience. It is a much abused term. Have all people a conscience? Has a cannibal a conscience? Must he be allowed to act according to the dictates of his conscience, which tells him that it is his duty to kill and eat his fellows? Now, the etymological meaning of conscience is 'true knowledge'. The dictionary meaning is 'faculty distinguishing between right and wrong and influencing conduct accordingly'. Possession of such a faculty is possible only for a trained person, that is, one who has undergone discipline and learnt to listen to the inner voice.

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But even amongst the most conscientious persons, there will be room enough for honest differences of opinion. The only possible rule of conduct in any civilized society is, therefore, mutual toleration. It can be inculcated among and practised by all irrespective of their status and training.[25]

Why Quarrel?

THIS means that for God-fearing men, all religions are good and equal; only the followers of different religions quarrel against one another and thereby deny their respective religions.[26]

The key to the solution of the tangle lies in everyone following the best in his own religion, and entertaining equal regard for the other religions and their followers.[27]

Do people become enemies because they change their religion? Is the God of the Mohammedan different from the God of the Hindu? Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause for quarrelling?.... The more we advance in true knowledge, the better we shall understand that we need not be at war with those whose religion we may not follow.... If everyone will try to understand the core of his own religion and adhere to it, and will not allow false teachers to dictate to him, there will be no room left for quarrelling.[28]

Why should we blaspheme God by fighting one another because we see Him through different media — the *Quran*, the *Bible*, the *Talmud*, the *Avesta* or the *Gita*? The same Sun beats on the Himalayas as on the plains. Should the men of plains quarrel with the men of the snows because of the different feel of the Sun? Why should we make of books and formulas so many fetters to

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enslave us, rather than use them as aids to our deliverance and union of hearts?[29]

To revile one another's religion, to make reckless statements, to utter untruth, to break the heads of innocent men, to desecrate temples or mosques, *is* a denial of God. We have listened to Satan. Religion — call it by what name you like — is made of sterner stuff.[30]

It is enough to know that some of us are blaspheming a patient God and doing inhuman deeds in the sacred name of religion. I know, too, that neither assassination, nor fratricidal acts can possibly save religion. Religion worth the name can only be saved by purity, humility and fearlessness of the uttermost type among its professors.[31]

No religion in the world can live without self-suffering. A faith gains in strength only when people are willing to lay down their lives for it. The tree of life has to be watered with the blood of martyrs, who lay down their lives without killing their opponents or intending any harm to them. That is the root of Hinduism and of all other religions.[32]

Religion is sustained never by the sword, but always by men of God. But we should be so not merely in name, but by our conduct. Only Rama (God, *Allah* or by whatever name one might call Him) is the true object of worship. He is not won over by offerings, except the offering of noble conduct. Universal love becomes incumbent on Rama's devotees. That is the only way in which Hinduism or, for that matter, any religion can survive. Hinduism or any religion that departs from this straight path is doomed to destruction.[33]

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CHAPTER II

SCRIPTURES OF THE WORLD

A Sacred Duty

I HOLD that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. We need not dread upon our grown up children the influence of scriptures other than our own. We liberalize their outlook upon life by ecouraging them to study freely all that is clean. Fear there would be when someone reads his own scriptures to young people with the intention, secretly or openly, of converting them. He must then be biassed in favour of his own scriptures. For myself, I regard my study of and reverence for the *Bible*, the *Quran*, and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu. He is no *Sanatani* Hindu who is narrow, bigoted, and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found supported in any Sanskrit book. I claim to be a staunch *Sanatani* Hindu because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures do satisfy the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for or my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have, indeed, left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.

Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussalman, with my own interpretation

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of the *Bible* or the *Quran*, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For, then, Hindu, Christian and Mussalman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus, nor Christians nor Mussalmans. There all are judged not according to their labels or professions, but according to their actions irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence, there will always be these labels. I, therefore, prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth, and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.[1]

I call myself a *Sanatani* Hindu, because I believe in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and the writings left by the holy reformers. This belief does not require me to accept as authentic everything that passes as *Shastras*. I reject everything that contradicts the fundamental principles of morality. I am not required to accept the *ipse dixit* or the interpretations of *Pandits*. Above all, I call myself a *Sanatani* Hindu, so long as the Hindu society in general accepts me as such. In a concrete manner, he is a Hindu who believes in God, immortality of the soul, transmigration, the Law of *Karma* and *Moksha*, and who tries to practise Truth and *Ahimsa* in daily life, and, therefore, practises cow-protection in its widest sense and understands and tries to act according to the Law of *Varnashrama*.[2]

Fundamentals of Religion

I DO not believe in the exclusive divinity of the *Vedas*. I believe the *Bible*, the *Quran*, and the *Zend Avesta* to be as much divinely inspired as the *Vedas*. My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first-hand knowledge of these wonderful

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books. But I do claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of the scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense. I do not emphatically repudiate the claim (if they advance any such) of the present Shankaracharyas and *Shastris* to give a correct interpretation of the Hindu scriptures. On the contrary, I believe that our present knowledge of these books is in a most chaotic state. I believe implicity in the Hindu aphorism, that no one truly knows the *Shastras* who has not attained perfection in Innocence (*Ahimsa*), Truth (*Satya*) and Self-control (*Brahmacharya*) and who has not renounced all acquisition or possession of wealth. I believe in the institution of *Gurus*, but in this age millions must go without a *Guru*, because it is a rare thing to find a combination of perfect purity and perfect learning. But one need not despair of ever knowing the truth of one's religion, because the fundamentals of Hinduism as of every great religion are unchangeable, and easily understood.[3]

The Sermon and the Gita

I HAVE not been able to see any difference between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. What the *Sermon* describes in a graphic manner, the *Bhagavad Gita* reduces to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the accepted sense of the term, but it has argued out the Law of Love—the Law of Abandon, as I would call it,—in a scientific manner. The *Sermon on the Mount* gives the same law in wonderful language. The *New Testament* gave me comfort and boundless joy, as it came after the repulsion that parts of the *Old* had given me. Today, supposing I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the *Sermon*,

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I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the *Gita*.

There is one thing in me, and that is that I love to see the bright side of things and not the seamy side, and so I can derive comfort and inspiration from any great book of any great religion. I may not be able to reproduce a single verse from the *Gita* or the *New Testament*, a Hindu child or Christian child may be able to repeat the verses better, but those clever children cannot deprive me of the assimilation that is in me today of the spirit of the two books.[4]

There have been many times when I did not know which way to turn. But I have gone to the *Bible*, and particularly the *New Testament*, and have drawn strength from its message.[5]

Q. You like the *Sermon on the Mount*?

A. Oh yes. Even my declaration that I like it is exploited by Christian friends. But let that be.

Q. I would like you to tell me one passage which has given you more satisfaction than any other.

A. I do not know. But I shall give you a passage that I have often quoted to those who came to convert me to Christianity: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, and every thing will be added unto you.' I saw this emphasized in one of Tolstoy's beautiful stories. It gripped me, and also what he wrote underneath it.[6]

'The Letter Killeth'

"THE letter killeth, the spirit giveth life". My very first reading of the *Bible* showed me that I would be repelled by many things in it, if I gave their literal meaning to many texts or even took every passage in it as the word of God. I found, as I proceeded with my study of the scriptures of the various religions, that every

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scripture had to be treated likewise, not excepting the *Vedas* or the *Upanishads*. Therefore, the story of the Immaculate Conception, when I interpret it mystically, does not repel me. I should find it hard to believe in the literal meaning of the verses relating to the immaculate conception of Jesus. Nor would it deepen my regard for Jesus if I gave those verses their literal meaning. This does not mean that the writers of the *Gospels* were untruthful persons. They wrote in a mood of exaltation. Form my youth upward, I learnt the art of estimating the value of scriptures on the basis of their ethical teaching. Miracles, therefore, had no interest for me. The miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, even if I had believed them literally, would not have reconciled me to any teaching that did not satisfy universal ethics. Somehow or other, words of religious teachers have for me, as I presume for millions, a living force which the same words uttered by ordinary mortals do not possess.

The *Gita* has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God. "Verily, verily I say unto you, not everyone that sayeth unto me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven shall enter the Kingdom," was said, though in different words, by all great teachers of the world.

The Final Guide

I DO believe in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Smritis* and the *Puranas*. But, to me, the *Gita* is the key to a

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knowledge of the *Shastras*. It enunciates the principles on which all conduct must be based. It sums up the whole of the *Shastras* and, therefore, absolves laymen from having to explore the other books. But I go a step further. The *Vedas* are not the four books known as such. They contain only fragments of the originals. Eternal Truth cannot be buried in or confined to printed books. The *Vedas* are, therefore, indefinable and unwritten. They reside in one's heart. And, our *Shastras* tell us what discipline and study are necessary for opening out the heart for receiving the Truth. One's experience, therefore, must be the final guide. The written word undoubtedly helps, but even that has to be interpreted; and when there are conflicting interpretations, the seeker is the final arbiter.[8]

No Question of Selection

I BELIEVE in the equality of all religions. I derive the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. I have also derived solace from the *New Testament* and the *Quran*. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the *Bhagavad Gita*, though everything in the former may not appeal to me—everything in the *Epistles* of Paul for instance,—nor everything in Tulsidas. The *Gita* is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore, there is no question of selection.

I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet; and then

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through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Matthew may give one version of one text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to Divine revelation. And, above all, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life'. I believe in Faith also, in things where Reason has no place, *e.g.*, the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason: 'Yet we are seven', I would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect: 'Yet there is God'.[9]

Religious Scriptures

I BELIEVE in the *Bible* as I believe in the *Gita*. I regard all the great faiths of the world as equally true with my own. It hurts me to see any one of them caricatured as they are today by their own followers.[10]

I hold *Granth Sahib* in high reverence. Several parts of it have passed into our daily speech. So far as my reading of it goes, it inculcates faith, valour and an invincible belief in the ultimate triumph of right and justice.[11]

The *Vedas* are from time immemorial. So are the *Upanishads*. But they are imperfectly known. Any impurities that have crept in any of the scriptures are due to the fact that they were written many years later. The Hindu religion is a great religion and has infinite toleration in it and powers of absorption. God is everywhere, as the Harijan woman saint told her young questioner. He is the ruler of mens' hearts. He only wants sigle-minded worship in whatsoever form it be and whatsoever language.[12]

It is the duty of everyone to study the scriptures of religions other than his own. This enables people to keep

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their religion pure and rid it of blemishes. Moreover, we have Christians, Muslims, Parsis and followers of other religions amongst us. It behoves the Hindus to study their religious books if they regard them as their brothers.[13]

Every work labelled as scripture is not necessarily so. Moreover, a scripture to be scientific lends itself to emendations as the times may really require. They must progress with the times, if they are to live in the lives of the people. The changeless and universal fundamentals are always very few. They do not require learned treatises to be described. The treatises are built upon these immovable rocks.[14]

How to Study Great Religions

THERE is one rule, however, which should always be kept in mind while studying all great religions, and that is that one should study them only through the writings of known votaries of the respective religions. For instance, if one wants to study the *Bhagavat*, one should do so not through a translation of it made by a hostile critic, but one prepared by a lover of the *Bhagavat*. Similarly, to study the *Bible*, one should study it through the commentaries of devoted Christians. This study of other religions, besides one's own, will give one a grasp of the rock-bottom unity of all religions and afford a glimpse also of that Universal and Absolute Truth which lies beyond the 'dust of creeds and faiths'.

Let no one, even for a moment, entertain the fear that a reverent study of other religions is likely to weaken or shake one's faith in one's own. The Hindu system of philosophy regards all religions as containing the elements of Truth in them, and enjoins an attitude of respect and reverence towards them all. This, of course, presupposes

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regards for one's own religion. Study and appreciation of other religions need not cause a weakening of that regard; it should mean extension of that regard to other religions.

In this respect, religion stands on the same footing as culture. Just as preservation of one's own culture does not mean contempt for that of others, but requires assimilation of the best that there may be in all the other cultures, even so should be the case with religion.[15]

Who is the Best Interpreter?

THE *Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis* and *Puranas,* including *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* are the Hindu Scriptures. Nor is this a finite list. Every age, or even generation, has added to the list. It follows, therefore, that everything printed or even found handwritten is not scripture. The *Smritis,* for instance, contain much that can never be accepted as the word of God. The scriptures, properly so called, can only be concerned with eternal verities and must appeal to any conscience, *i.e.,* any heart whose eyes of understanding are opened. Nothing can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or be capable of being spiritually experienced. And, even when you have an expurgated edition of the scriptures, you will need their interpretation. Who is the best interpreter? Not learned men, surely. Learning there must be. But religion does not live by it. It lives in the experiences of its saints and seers, in their lives and sayings. When all the most learned commentators of the scriptures are utterly forgotten, the accumulated experience of the sages and saints will abide and be an inspiration for ages to come.[16]

Need for Tolerance

IT IS no business of mine to criticize the scriptures of

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other faiths, or to point out their defects. It is, and should be, however, my privilege to proclaim and practise the truths that there may be in them. I may not, therefore, criticize or condemn things in the *Quran* or the life of the Prophet that I cannot understand. But I welcome every opportunity to express my admiration for such aspects of his life as I have been able to appreciate and understand. As for things that present difficulties, I am content to see them through the eyes of devout Mussalman friends, while I try to understand them with the help of the writings of eminent Muslim expounders of Islam. It is only through such a reverential approach to faiths other than mine that I can realize the principle of equality of all religions. But it is both my right and duty to point out the defects of Hinduism in order to purify it and to keep it pure. But when non-Hindu critics set about criticizing Hinduism and cataloguing its faults, they only blazon their own ignorance of Hinduism and their incapacity to regard it from the Hindu viewpoint. It distorts their vision and vitiates their judgment. Thus, my own experience of the non-Hindu critics of Hinduism brings home to me my limitations and teaches me to be wary of launching on a criticism of Islam or Christianity and their founders.[17]

God Is One

"WHO can name Him, and knowing what he says,
Say: 'I believe in Him'? and who can feel,
And, with self-violence, to consciuos wrong
Hardening his heart, say: 'I believe Him not'!
The All-Embracing, All-Sustaining One,
Say: does He not embrace, sustain, include
Thee?—Me—Himself? Bends not the sky above?
And earth, on which we are, is it not firm?
And over us, with constant kindly smile,
The sleepless stars keep everlasting watch!

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Am I not here gazing into thine eyes?
And does not All, that is,
—Seen and unseen—mysterious All—
Around thee, and within,
Untiring agency,
Press on thy heart and mind?
—Fill thy whole heart with it—and, when thou art
Lost in the consciousness of happiness,
Then call it what thou wilt
Happiness!—Heart!—Love!—God!
I have no name for it!
Feeling is all in all!
Name is but sound and reek
A mist around the glow of Heaven."

—GOETHE'S *Faust*

God is certainly One. He has no second. He is unfathomable, unknowable and unknown to the vast majority of mankind. He is everywhere. He sees without eyes, and hears without ears. He is formless and indivisible. He is uncreate, has no father, mother or child; and yet He allows Himself to be worshipped as father, mother, wife and child. He allows himself even to be worshipped as stock and stone, although He is none of these things. He is the most elusive. He is the nearest to us, if we would but know the fact. But He is farthest from us when we do not want to realize His omnipresence. There are many gods in the *Vedas*. Other scriptures call them angels. But the *Vedas* sing of only one God.

I have no hesitation in regarding the *Quran* as revealed, as I have none in regarding the *Bible*, the *Zend Avesta*, the *Granth Saheb* and any other clean scriptures as revealed. Revelation is the exclusive property of no nation, no tribe. If I know Hinduism at all, it is essentially inclusive and ever-growing, ever-responsive. It gives the freest scope to imagination,

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speculation and reason. I have found not the slighest difficulty in Hindu circles about evoking reverence for the *Quran* and the Prophet.

The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail, but is a sacrilege.

The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts. For Hindus to expect Islam, Christianity or Zoroastrianism to be driven out of India is as idle a dream as it would be for Mussalmans to have only Islam of their imagination rule the world. But if belief in One God and the race of His Prophets in a never-ending chain is sufficient for Islam, then we are all Mussalmans, but we are also all Hindus and Christians. Truth is the exclusive property of no single scripture.[18]

We must install God in our hearts. God is one, whatever the name given to Him. The realization of this truth should end all enmity and intolerance.

I would advise the Hindus and the Sikhs to read the *Quran* as they read the *Gita* and the *Granth Saheb*. To the Muslims, I would say that they should read the *Gita* and the *Granth Saheb* with the same reverence with which they read the *Quran*. They should understand the meaning of what they read and have equal regard for all religions. This is my life-long practice and ideal. I claim to be a *Sanatani* Hindu, though I am not an idolator in the accepted sense. But I cannot despise those who worship idols. The idol-worshipper sees God in

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the stone image. God is omnipresent. If it is wrong to seek God in a stone, how is it right to seek Him in a book called the *Gita,* the *Granth Saheb* or the *Quran?* Is not that also idol worship? By cultivating tolerance and respect, we will be able to learn from all.[19]

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CHAPTER III

TEMPLES AND TEMPLE-WORSHIP

The Temples

TEMPLES are so many bridges between the Unseen, Invisible and Indefinable God and ourselves who are infinitesimal drops in the Infinite Ocean. We, the human family, are not all philosophers. We are of the earth very earthy, and we are not satisfied with contemplating the Invisible God. Somehow or other, we want something which we can touch, something which we can see, something before which we can kneel down. It does not matter whether it is a book, or an empty stone building, or a stone building inhabited by numerous figures. A book will satisfy some, an empty building will satisfy some others, and many others will not be satisfied unless they see something inhabiting these empty buildings. Then, I ask you to approach these temples not as if they represented a body of superstitions. If you will approach these temples with faith in them, you will know that each time you visit them you will come away from them purified, and with your faith more and more in the living God.[1]

Temples are to Hindus what churches are to Christians. In my opinion, we are all idolators; that in Hinduism we have images of stone or metal inside temples makes to me no difference. Thousands of Hindus who visit temples in simple faith derive precisely the same spiritual benefit that Christians visiting churches in simple faith do. Deprive a Hindu of his temple, and you deprive him of the thing he generally prizes most in life. That superstition and even evil have grown round many Hindu temples is but too true. That, however,

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is an argument for temple reform, not for lowering their value for Harijans or any Hindu. It is my certain conviction that temples are an integral part of Hinduism.[2]

Places of Worship

PLACES of worship to me are not merely brick and mortar. They are but a shadow of Reality. Against every church and every mosque and every temple destroyed, hundreds have risen in their places. There is something in them which appeals to the heart and which transforms those who go there, not for show, not out of shame or fear, but out of simple devotion. It defies analysis. Nevertheless, the fact stands that pure-minded people going to the present places of pilgrimage, which have become hot-beds of error, superstition, and even immorality, return from them purer for the act of worship. Hence, the significant assurance in the *Bhagavad Gita*: 'I make return according to the spirit in which men worship Me.'[3]

Churches, mosques and temples, which cover so much hypocrisy and humbug and shut the poorest out of them, seem but a mockery of God and His worship, when one sees the eternally renewed temple of worship under the vast blue canopy inviting every one of us to real worship, instead of abusing His name by quarrelling in the name of religion.[4]

Temples, churches and mosques very often show corruption, more often deterioration. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to prove that all priests are bad or have been bad and that all churches, temples and mosques are hot-beds of corruption and superstition. Nor does the argument take note of this fundamental fact that no faith has done without a habitation; and I go further that in the very nature of things it cannot exist,

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so long as man remains as he is constituted. His very body has been rightly called the Temple of the Holy Ghost, though innumerable such temples belie the fact and are hot-beds of corruption used for dissoluteness. And, I presume that it will be accepted as a conclusive answer to a sweeping suggestion that all bodies should be destroyed for the corruption of many, if it can be shown, as it can be, that there are some bodies which are proper temples of the Holy Ghost. The cause for the corruption of many bodies will have to be sought elsewhere. Temples of stone and mortar are nothing else than a natural extension of these human temples, and though they were in their conception undoubtedly habitations of God like human temples, they have been subject to the same law of decay as the latter.

I know of no religion or sect that has done or is doing without its House of God, variously described as a temple, mosque, church, synagogue or *agiari*. Nor is it certain that any of the great reformers, including Jesus, destroyed or discarded temples altogether. All of them sought to banish corruption from temples as well as from society. Some of them, if not all, appear to have preached from temples. I have ceased to visit temples for years, but I do not regard myself on that account as a better person than before. My mother never missed going to the temple when she was in a fit state to go there. Probably, her faith was far greater than mine, though I do not visit temples. There are millions whose faith is sustained through these temples, churches and mosques. They are not all blind followers of a superstition, nor are they fanatics. Superstition and fanaticism are not their monopoly. These vices have their root in our hearts and minds.

That temples and temple-worship are in need of

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radical reform must be admitted. But to reject the necessity of temples is to reject the necessity of God, religion and earthly existence.[5]

Temple Worship

WHEN I bow to a living person and he returns it, it is a mutual exchange of courtesy and there is no particular merit about it. It may be a sign of good breeding. Temple-going is for the purification of the soul. The worshipper draws the best out of himself. In greeting a living being, he may draw the best out of the person greeted, if the greeting is selfless. A living being is, more or less, fallible like oneself. But in the temple, one worships the living God, perfect beyond imagination. Letters written to living persons often end in heart-breaking, even when they are answered, and there is no guarantee of their being always answered. Letters to God who, according to the devotee's imagination, resides in temples, require neither pen nor ink nor paper, not even speech. Mere mute worship constitutes the letter which brings its own unfailing answer. The whole function is a beautiful exercise of faith. Here there is no waste of effort, no heart-breaking, no danger of being misunderstood. The writer must try to understand the simple philosophy lying behind the worship in temples or mosques or churches. He will understand my meaning better, if he will realize that I make no distinction between these different abodes of God. They are what faith has made them. They are an onswer to man's craving somehow to reach the UNSEEN.

For the faithful Hindu, his Incarnation is without blemish. Krishna of the Hindu devotee is a perfect being. He is unconcerned with the harsh judgment of the critics. Millions of devotees of Krishna and Rama

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have had their lives transformed through their contemplation of God by these names. How this phenomenon happens, I do not know. It is a mystery. I have not attempted to prove it. Though my reason and heart long ago realized the highest attribute and name of God as Truth, I recognize Truth by the name of Rama. In the darkest hour of my trial, that one name has saved me and is still saving me. It may be the association of childhood, it may be the fascination that Tulsidas has wrought on me. But the potent fact is there, and as I write these lines, my memory revives the scenes of my childhood when I used daily to visit the *Ramji Mandir* adjacent to my ancestral home. My Rama then resided there. He saved me from many fears and sins. It was no superstition for me. The custodian of the idol may have been a bad man. I know nothing against him. Misdeeds might have gone on in the temple. Again I know nothing of them. Therefore, they would not affect me. What was and is true of me is true of millions of Hindus.[6]

Idol-Worship

I DO not regard the existence of a temple as a sin or superstition. Some form of common worship, and a common place of worship appear to be a human necessity Whether the temples should contain images or not is a matter of temperament and taste. I do not regard a Hindu or a Roman Catholic place of worship containing images as necessarily bad or superstitious, and a mosque or a Protestant place of worship as good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a Cross or a book may easily become idolatrous, and, therefore, superstitious. And the worship of the image of Child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It

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depends upon the attitude of the heart of the worshipper.[7]

I do not disbelieve in idol-worship. An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol-worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism. Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. No Hindu considers an image to be God. I do not consider idol-worship a sin.[8]

I am both an idolator and an iconoclast in what I conceive to be the true senses of the terms. I value the spirit behind idol-worship. It plays a most important part in the uplift of the human race. And I would like to possess the ability to defend with my life the thousands of holy temples which sanctify this land of ours.

I am an iconoclast in the sense that I break down the subtle form of idolatry in the shape of fanaticisim that refuses to see any virtue in any other form of worshipping the Deity save one's own. This form of idolatry is more deadly for being more fine and evasive than the tangible and gross form of worship that identifies the Deity with a little bit of a stone or a golden image.[9]

I would worship an idol even made of clay, if thereby my mind becomes lighter. If my life becomes fruitful, then only the worship of young Krishna's idol has meaning. The stone is no God; but God resides in the stone. If I besmear the idol with sandalwood paste, make an offering of rice, and pray to it for strength to cut off so many heads, one of you should throw the idol into a deep well, or break it into pieces.[10]

Tree-Worship

I AM both a supporter and opponent of image-worship.

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When image-worship degenerates into idolatry and becomes encrusted with false beliefs and doctrines, it becomes a necessity to combat it as a gross social evil. On the other hand, image-worship, in the sense of investing one's ideal with a concrete shape, is inherent in man's nature and even valuable as an aid to devotion. Thus, we worship an image when we offer homage to a book which we regard as holy or sacred. We worship an image when we visit a temple or a mosque with a feeling of sanctity or reverence. Nor do I see any harm in all this. On the contrary, endowed as man is with a finite, limited understanding, he can hardly do otherwise. Even so, far from seeing anything inherently evil or harmful in tree-worship, I find in it a thing instinct with a deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom which, with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declares to us as it were with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God. Without vegetation, our planet would not be able to support life even for a moment. In such a country especially, therefore, in which there is a scarcity of trees, tree-worship assumes a profound economic significance.

I, therefore, see no necessity for leading a crusade against tree-worship. It is true, that the poor simple-minded women who offer worship to trees have no reasoned understanding of the implications of their act. Possibly, they would not be able to give any explanation as to why they perform it. They act in the purity and utter simplicity of their faith. Such faith is not a thing to be despised; it is a great and powerful force that we should treasure.

Far different, however, is the case of vows and prayers which votaries offer before trees. The offering of

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vows and prayers for selfish ends, whether offered in churches, mosques, temples or before trees and shrines, is a thing not to be encouraged. Making of selfish requests or offering of vows is not related to image-worship as effect and cause. A personal selfish prayer is bad whether made before an image or an unseen God.

Let no one, however, from this understand me to mean that I advocate tree-worship in general. I do not defend tree-worship because I consider it to be a necessary aid to devotion, but only because I recognize that God manifests Himself in innumerable forms in this universe, and every such manifestation commands my spontaneous reverence.[11]

Personally, I am as much an idol-worshipper as an idol-breaker, and I suggest that all — whether Hindu, Muslim or any other — are also so, whether they admit it or not. I know that mankind thirsts for symbolism. Are not *Masjids* or churches in reality the same as *Mandirs*? God resides everywhere, no less in stock or stone than in a single hair on the body of man. But men associate sacredness with particular places and things more than with others. Such sentiment is worthy of respect when it does not mean restrictions on similar freedom for others.[12]

Idolatry is implanted in the human heart. There is idol-worship in the *Quran*. What is a mosque? It is a species of idol-worship. The word 'idol' does not apply only to a human figure. Anything that the eye can see is an idol. The belief that *Allah* resides in the mosque, and the custom to turn the face to Mecca during prayers, are a species of idolatry. But the Muslims would retort: 'Maybe, it is idolatory; but your idolatry is of an altogether different variety.' The rock-bottom truth is that we are all idolators.[13]

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A Model Temple

THE modern Hindu temple is a hot-bed of superstition, as are more or less other 'Houses of God'. But I have not been able to subscribe to their corollary that the remedy for the abuse lies in the destruction of temples.

But by far the largest number of persons believe in the reform, not destruction of temples. There is no doubt that temple reform is necessary. But here, again, there is need for caution. Some of them think that it is possible to replace all the existing temples with new ones. I do not share that view. All temples will never be alike. They will always vary, as they have done in the past, with the varying human needs. What a reformer should be concerned with is a radical change more in the inward spirit than in the outward form. If the first is changed, the second will take care of itself. If the first remains unchanged, the second, no matter how radically changed, will be like a whited sepulchre. A mausoleum, however beautiful, is a tomb and not a mosque, and a bare plot of consecrated ground may be a real Temple of God.

Therefore, the first desideratum is the priest. My ideal priest must be a man of God. He must be a true servant of the people. He should have the qualifications of a guide, friend and philosopher to those among whom he is officiating. He must be a whole-timer with the least possible needs and personal ties. He should be versed in the *Shastras*. His whole concern will be to look after the welfare of his people. I have not drawn a fanciful picture. It is almost true to life. It is based on the recollections of my childhood. The priest I am recalling was looked up to by the prince and the people. They flocked round him for advice and guidance in the time of their need.

If the sceptic says such a priest is hard to find

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nowadays, he would be partly right. But I would ask the reformer to wait for building the temple of his ideal till he finds his priest.

Meanwhile, let him cultivate in himself the virtues he will have in the priest of his imagination. Let him expect these from the priests of existing temples. In other words, by his gentle and correct conduct, let him infect his immediate surroundings with the need of the times and let him have faith that his thought, surcharged with his own correct conduct, will act more powerfully than the mightiest dynamo. Let him not be impatient to see the result in a day. A thought may take years of conduct to evolve the requisite power. What are years or generations in the life of a great reform?

Now, perhaps, the reader will follow my view of a model temple. I can present him with no architect's plan and specification. Time is not ripe for it. But that does not baffle me and it need not baffle the reformer. He can choose the site for his future temple. It must be as extensive as he can get it. It need not be in the heart of a village or a city. It should be easily accessible to the Harijans and the other poor, and yet it must not be in insanitary surroundings. In any case, I would aim at making the plinth of the actual temple as high as possible. And on this site I should select my plot for daily worship. Round this will come into being a school, a dispensary, a library, secular and religious. The school may serve also as a meeting or debating hall. I should have a *dharmashala* or guest-house connected with the temple. Each one of these will be a separate institution and yet subordinate to the temple and may be built simultaneously or one after another as circumstances and funds may permit. The buildings may or may not be substantial. If labour is voluntary, as it well may be, with mud and

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straw, a beginning may be made at once. But the temple is not yet built. The foundation was laid when the site was procured, the plot for the temple was selected and the first prayer was offered. For the *Bhagavat* says:

'Wherever people meet and utter His name
from their hearts,
There God dwells, there is His temple.'

The building, the deity, the consecration, is the province of the priest. When he is found, he will set about his task, but the temple began its existence from the time of the first prayer. And if it was the prayer of true men and women, its continuous progress was assured.

But we must also deal with the existing temples. They can become real Houses of God today, if the worshippers will insist on the priests conforming to the ideal presented by me.[14]

Temple Reform

WHAT we need most is the restoration of the temples to their pristine purity and sanctity. The ideal lying behind temples is most holy. In the temples of ancient India resided great *Rishis*, who imparted divine wisdom. Today, the priest sits there barring the way to those who need instruction and help to solve the problems of life. Alas! the priests of all religions are more in need of instruction than the poor masses.

These words are true. Never was the need for temple reform more urgent than today. Temples supply a felt want. If the priests had better education and would be custodians of the spirituality of the people, the temples would be houses both of worship and spiritual instruction as they were before.[15]

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CHAPTER IV

CONVERSIONS

'Physician, Heal Thyself!'

IN my opinion, there is no such thing as proselytism in Hinduism as it is understood in Christianity or, to a lesser extent, in Islam. The modern method does not appeal to me. It has done more harm than good. Though regarded as a matter of the heart purely and one between the Maker and oneself, it has degenerated into an appeal to the selfish instinct. My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are, more or less, true. All proceed from the same God but all are imperfect, because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality. The real *Shuddhi* movement should consist in each one trying to arrive at perfection in his or her own faith. In such a plan, character would be the only test. What is the use of crossing from one compartment to another, if it does not mean a moral rise? What is the meaning of my trying to convert to the service of God (for, that must be the implication of *Shuddhi* or *Tabligh*) when those who are in my fold are every day denying God by their actions? "Physician, heal thyself!" is more true in matters religious than mundane.[1]

I would personally like the stopping of all conversions and *Shuddhis*. One's faith is a personal matter with oneself. It is open to any person of mature age to change his or her faith, when and as often as he or she wishes. But if I could do so, I would stop all propaganda except through one's conduct. Conversion is a matter of heart and reason. An appeal to heart and reason can only be made through conduct.[2]

It is idle to talk of winning souls for God. Is God so

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helpless that He cannot win souls for Himself? Everyone's religion is a personal matter with himself. I cannot preach Hinduism; I can but practise it.[3]

Work of God

I DO not believe in conversion by human agency. Seekers after Truth are in the same position as the blind men in the Indian parable who went to see an elephant, or rather in a worse position. For, if the physically blind lacked in sight, they were compensated for it to some extent by the enhanced power of other organs of sense. But seekers after Truth can only see as through a glass darkly, so far as inward sight is concerned. It would, therefore, be sheer presumption on their part to seek to 'convert' others to their own faith. God has as many ways of approaching Him as there are human beings.[4]

If conversion is the work of God, why should that work be taken away from Him? And who is man to take away anything from God? He may become humble instrument in the hands of God. Even so, he cannot be judge of men's hearts. I often wonder whether we are always true judges of our own hearts. 'Man, know thyself' must have been wrung out of a desperate heart. And if we know so little of ourselves, how much less must we know of our neighbours and remote strangers who may differ from us in a multitude of things, some of which are of the highest moment.[5]

It is unthinkable that a man will become good or attain salvation only if he embraces a particular religion, — Hinduism, Christianity or Islam. Purity of character and salvation depend on the purity of heart.[6]

No Sanction for Conversions

THE *Gita* and the *Tulsi Ramayana* teach me to resort to self-purification whenever I am or my religion is in

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danger. And what is true for me is true for all. That process of self-purification I am going through all the twenty-four hours of my days. Parvati, Narada had foretold, would have an ominous-looking husband. She knew that only Shiva was as blissful as he was ominous-looking, and she performed penance for winning Shiva and won him. So, the lesson of penance and self-purification is writ large everywhere in our scriptures and the Himalayas are the living witness to it—the Himalayas where countless *Rishis* ground their bodies to dust for self-purification. The *Vedas*, to me, are not the texts writ on paper, but my very conscience and the Indweller. They tell me to observe *Yama* and *Niyama** (the cardinal and the casual virtues) and trust everything to Lord Krishna.[7]

After much prayerful study of the Hindu *Shastras*, I have come to the conclusion that there is no room in them for conversions such as they have in Islam and Christianity. I am also certain, on a prayerful reading of the *Quran*, that there is no warrant for the *Tabligh* that is being promoted today. It is possible that I may be mistaken. Let God correct me in that case. I, for myself, would love to protect my religion with *tapashcharya*—the way of prayerful suffering which is the royal road to success in any noble object. I must be free to read the *Gita* or the *Quran* of my own accord. Why should a Hindu compel me to read the one, or a Mussalman to read the

* Yamas, the cardial virtues, according to Yogashastra, are Ahimsa (Non-violence), Satya (Truth), Asteya (Non-stealing) Brahmacharya (Celibacy), Aparigraha (Non-possession); and the Niyamas or the casual virtues are, according to the same authority, Shaucha (Bodily purity) Santosha (Contentment), Tapa (Forebearance), Swadhyaya (Study of Scriptures), Ishwarapranidhana (Resignation to the Will of God).

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other? Why should I need a Christian to compel me to read the *Bible*? No one may stand between a man and his religion or God. He who has no inkling of religion, whose heart is arid and unpurified—how dare he purify (by proselytizing) others?[8]

What Religion Means

IF a change of religion could be justified for worldly betterment, I would advise it without hesitation. But religion is a matter of the heart. No physical inconvenience can warrant abandonment of one's own religion.

Religion is not a matter of convenience or of bettering one's social or material condition. People have been known to cling to their religion although they have had to face social ostracism, material ruin and much worse. One's religion keeps one true in the face of the greatest adversity. It is the sheet-anchor of one's hope in this world and even after. It binds one to one's God, to Truth, as to nothing else.[9]

One's religion ought to be totally independent of the conduct of other people towards us. Our religion has its source from God within. And if we will be true to our God, we will never forsake the faith we derive from Him. With God as our Guide, Master, Ruler, in everything that we may do, we can defy the whole world's opposition and stick to our faith.[10]

I have no use for people who can change their religion like their clothes. They would not be an asset to any religion.[11]

Religion must be a very poor stuff, if it admits of change like one's clothes. Religion (binding faith) is made of sterner stuff; it is a deep personal matter, more personal than honour. To be true, it must be able to defy coercion of the extremest type.[12]

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Religion is an essentially personal matter. It is one between oneself and one's God. It should never be made a matter of bargain.[13]

Religion is not a matter of barter. It is a matter for every individual to decide for himself to which faith he will belong. It does not lend itself to purchase in any shape or form. Or, if such an expression can be used in connection with things of the spirit, religion can only be purchased with one's own blood.[14]

Conversion under the stress of physical discomfort is no spiritual conversion.[15]

Religion is a matter of life and death. A man does not change religion as he changes his garments. He takes it with him beyond the grave. Nor does a man profess his religion to oblige others. He professes a religion because he cannot do otherwise. A faithful husband loves his wife as he would love no other woman. Even her faithlessness would not wean him from his faith. The bond is more than blood-relationship. So is the religious bond, if it is worth anything. It is a matter of the heart.[16]

A Heart Process

PROGRESS of liberal study of religions of the world is bound to revolutionize the existing clumsy method of proselytizing which looks to the form rather than the substance. It is the transference of allegiance from one fold to another and the mutual decrying of rival faiths which gives rise to mutual hatred.

I am against conversion, whether it is known as *Shuddhi* by Hindus, *Tabligh* by Mussalmans or proselytizing by Christians. Conversion is a heart-process known only to and by God. It must be left to itself . . . Those who believe in it have a perfect right to follow their own course without let or hindrance, so long as it is kept within proper limits, *i.e.*, so long as there is no force nor fraud nor

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material inducement and so long as the parties are free agents and of mature age and understanding.[17]

I have, of course, always believed in the principle of religious tolerance. But I have even gone further. I have advanced from tolerance to equal respect for all religions. All religions are branches of the same mighty tree, but I must not change over from one branch to another for the sake of expediency. By doing so, I cut the branch on which I am sitting. Therefore, I always feel the change-over from one religion to another very keenly, unless it is a case of spontaneous urge, a result of inner growth. Such conversions by their very nature cannot be on a mass scale and never to save one's life or property or for temporal gain.[18]

It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is perhaps the greatest impediment to the world's progress towards peace. 'Warring creeds' is a blasphemous expression. And it fitly describes the state of things in India, the Mother as I believe her to be of Religion or religions. If she is truly the Mother, the motherhood is on trial. Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and *vice versa*? Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man? If the morals of a man is a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a church, a mosque or a temple is an empty formula; it may even be a hindrance to individual or social growth, and insistence on a particular form or repetition of a credo may be a potent cause of violent quarrels leading to bloodshed and ending in utter disbelief in Religion *i.e.*, God Himself.[19]

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CHAPTER V

CHRISTIANITY

My Reaction to Christianity

EVEN when I was 18, I came in touch with good Christians in London. Before that I had come in touch with what I used then to call 'beef and beer-bottle Christianity', for these were regarded as the indispensable criteria of a man becoming a Christian, with also a third thing, namely, adoption of a European style of dress. Those Christians were parodying St. Paul's teaching 'Call thou nothing unclean'. I went to London, therefore, with that prejudice against Christianity. I came across good Christians there who placed the *Bible* in my hands. Then I met numerous Christians in South Africa, and I have since grown to this belief that Christianity is as good and as true a religion as my own. For a time, I struggled with the question : 'Which was the true religion out of those I knew?' But, ultimately, I came to the deliberate conviction that there was no such thing as only one true religion and every other false. There is no religion that is absolutely perfect. All are equally imperfect or, more or less, perfect. Hence, the conclusion that Christianity is as good and true as my own religion. But so also about Islam or Zoroastrianism or Judaism.

I, therefore, do not take literally true the text that Jesus is the only begotten son of God. God cannot be the exclusive Father and I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster. Similarly, I do not regard every word of the *Bible* as the inspired word of God, even as I do not regard every word of the *Vedas* or the *Quran* as inspired. The SUM TOTAL of each of these books is

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certainly inspired, but I miss that inspiration in many of the things taken individually. The *Bible* is as much a book of religion with me as the *Gita* and the *Quran*.

I would also dispute the claim that Christianity is the ONLY true religion. It is ALSO a true religion, a noble religion, and along with other religions it has contributed to raise the moral height of mankind. But it has yet to make a greater contribution. After all, what are 2,000 years in the life of a religion? Just now, Christianity comes to yearning mankind in a tainted form. Fancy, bishops supporting slaughter in the name of Christianity![1]

Fundamental Position

Q. How could you reconcile yourself to believing all religions to be true?

A. That has been my fundamental position for years. Underlying it is the idea that you don't become the judges of the world. Differences in the world there have been, and will be. God is All-Powerful. He appears in many shapes and forms. If we search, we may find as many religions as there are men. Hundreds of men are merely striving to know the Truth. They will put the Truth in their own way. No two men will put it in identical terms. Though I know that God—the All-Powerful—resides in every one of us, we are imperfect media. We are all different. No two bodies are indentically the same. No two leaves of the tree are identically the same; there is bound to be some difference. Each one prays to God according to his own light. Who am I to judge and say that I pray better than you do? I don't judge the Muslims, Parsis, Christians and Jews. If I am a seeker of Truth, it is quite sufficient for me. I cannot say that because I have seen God in this way, the whole world must see Him in that way. All religions are true and equal. That, however, is not to say that they are equally true in religi-

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ous terms or are absolutely true. Another man's religion is true for him, as mine is for me. I cannot be a judge of his religion. That is my fundamental position.[2]

Conflicting Counsels

Dr. Crane: But when you say that all religions are true, what do you do when there are conflicting counsels?

Gandhiji: I have no difficulty in hitting upon the truth, because I go by certain fundamental maxims. Truth is superior to everything, and I reject what conflicts with it. Similarly, that which is in conflict with Non-violence should be rejected. And, on matters which can be reasoned out, that which conflicts with Reason must also be rejected.

Dr. Crane: In matters which can be reasoned out?

Gandhiji: Yes, there are subjects where Reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict Reason, but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of Reason. Well then, given these three criteria, I can have no difficulty in examining all claims made on behalf of religion. Thus, to believe that Jesus is the only begotten son of God, is to me against Reason, for God can't marry and beget children. The word 'son' there can only be used in a figurative sense. In that sense everyone, who stands in the position of Jesus, is a begotton son of God. If a man is spiritually miles ahead of us, we may say that he is in a special sense, the son of God, though we are all children of God. We repudiate the relationship in our lives, whereas his life is a witness to that relationship.

Dr. Crane: Then, you will recognize degrees of Divinity. Would you not say that Jesus was the most divine?

Gandhiji: No, for the simple reason that we have no

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data. Historically, we have more data about Mohammed than anyone else because he was more recent in time. For Jesus, there is less data and still less for Buddha, Rama and Krishna; and when we know so little about them, is it not preposterous to say that one of them was more divine than another? In fact, even if there were a great deal of data available, no judge should shoulder the burden of sifting all the evidence, if only for this reason that it requires a highly spiritual person to gauge the degree of divinity of the subjects he examines. To say that Jesus was 99 per cent divine, and Mohammed 50 per cent, and Krishna 10 per cent, is to arrogate to oneself a function which really does not belong to me.

Dr. Crane: But let us take a debatable point. Supposing I was debating between whether violence is justified or not. Mohammedanism would say one thing, Christianity another.

Gandhiji: Then, I must decide with the help of the tests I have suggested.

Dr. Crane: But does not Mohammed prescribe the use of the sword in certain circumstances?

Gandhiji: I suppose most Muslims will agree. But I read religion in a different way. Khansaheb Abdul Gaffar Khan derives his belief in non-violence from the *Quran,* and the Bishop of London derives his belief in violence from the *Bible.* I derive my belief in non-violence from the *Gita,* whereas there are others who read violence in it. But if the worst came to the worst, and if I came to the conclusion that the *Quran* teaches violence, I would still reject violence; but I would not, therefore, say that the *Bible* is superior to the *Quran* or that Mohammed is inferior to Jesus. It is not my function to judge Mohammed and Jesus. It is enough that my non-violence is independent of the sanction of scriptures. But the fact remains

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that religious books have a hold upon mankind which other books have not. They have made a greater impression on me than Mark Twain or, to take a more appropriate instance, Emerson. Emerson was a thinker. Jesus and Mohammed were through and through men of action in a sense Emerson would never be. Their power was derived from their faith in God.[3]

Personality of Jesus

Q. I should be obliged to hear from you your attitude to the personality of Jesus.

A. I have often made it clear. I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but I do not regard him as the only begotten son of God. That epithet, in its material interpretation, is quite unacceptable. Metaphorically, we are all begotten sons of God, but for each of us there may be different begotten sons of God in a special sense. Thus, for me, Chaitanya may be the only begotten son of God.

Q. But don't you believe in the *perfection* of human nature, and don't you believe that Jesus had attained perfection?

A. I believe in the *perfectibility* of human nature. Jesus came as near to perfection as possible. To say that he was perfect is to deny God's superiority to man. And then, in this matter, I have a theory of my own. Being necessarily limited by the bounds of flesh, we can attain perfection only after dissolution of the body. Therefore, God alone is absolutely perfect. When he descends to earth, He, of His own accord, limits Himself. Jesus died on the Cross because he was limited by the flesh. I do not need either the prophecies or the miracles to establish Jesus' greatness as a teacher. Nothing can be more miraculous than the three years of his ministry. There is no miracle in the story of the multitude being fed on a handful of loaves. A magician can create that illusion.

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But woe worth the day on which a magician would be hailed as the Saviour of Humanity. As for Jesus raising the dead to life, well, I doubt if the men he raised were really dead. I raised a relative's child from supposed death to life, but that was because the child was not dead, and but for my presence there, she might have been cremated. But I saw that life was not extinct. I gave her an enema and she was restored to life. There was no miracle about it. I do not deny that Jesus had certain psychic powers and he was undoubtedly filled with the love of humanity. But he brought to life not people who were dead, but who were believed to be dead. The laws of Nature are changeless, unchangeable, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws. But we limited beings fancy all kinds of things and impute our limitations to God. We may copy God, but not He us. We may not divide Time for Him, Time for Him is Eternity. For us there is past, present and future. And what is human life of a hundred years but less than a mere speck in the Eternity of Time?[4]

The Place of Jesus

FOR many, many years I have regarded Jesus of Nazareth as one amongst the mighty teachers that the world has had, and I say this in all humility. I claim humility for this expression for the simple reason that this is exactly what I feel. Of course, Christians claim a higher place for Jesus of Nazareth than as a non-Christian and as a Hindu I have been able to feel. I purposely use the word 'feel' instead of 'give', because I consider that neither I, nor anybody else, can possibly arrogate to himself the claim of giving place to a great man.

The great teachers of mankind have had the places not given to them, but the place has belonged to them as a matter of right, as a matter of service that they have

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rendered; but it is given to the lowest and humblest amongst us to feel certain things about certain people. The relation between great teachers and ourselves is somewhat after the style of relation between a husband and wife. It would be a most terrible thing, a tragic thing, if I were to argue out intellectually for myself what place I was to give to my wife in my heart. It is not in my giving, but she takes the place that belongs to her as a matter of right in my heart. It is a matter purely for feeling.

Then, I can say that Jesus occupies in my heart the place of one of the great teachers who have made a considerable influence on my life. Leave the Christians alone for the present. I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus. I have come to the conclusion, in my own experience, that those who, no matter to what faith they belong, reverently study the teachings of other faiths, broaden their own instead of narrowing their hearts. Personally, I do not regard any of the great religions of the world as false. All have served in enriching mankind and are now even serving their purpose. A liberal education should include a reverent study of other faiths.

There is one thing which occurs to me, which came to me in my early studies of the *Bible*. It seized me immediately. I read the passage: 'Make this world the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness and everything will be added unto you.' I tell you that if you will understand, appreciate and act up to the spirit of this passage, you won't even need to know what place Jesus or any other teacher occupies in your heart.[5]

Fruitless Comparison

IN spite of most devout attention to every word ascribed to Jesus in *The New Testament*, and in spite of my

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having read in a humble spirit all about Jesus, I have really not seen any fundamental distinction between Jesus and the other teachers, I can understand, explain and appreciate... Nobody taught me in my childhood to differentiate. I have, therefore, grown without bias one way or the other. I can pay equal homage to Jesus, Mohammed, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster and others that may be named. But this is not a matter for argument. It is a matter for each one's deep and sacred conviction.[6]

A comparison between Jesus and other men revered by humanity is fruitless. Jesus of history is not the same as the Jesus whom Christians adore. For them, he is the living God of their conception. Similarly, I myself believe in the Krishna of my own imagination, who is identical with God and has not much to do with the historic Krishna about whom there is a mass of conflicting evidence. Historical persons are dead. The mystical incarnations are living ideas—more real than earthy existences. Religion can never be based on history, for, if it is so based, faith would be undermined. Tulsidas, therefore, clinches the point by saying that *Nama* (the name) is greater than Rama.[7]

Q. Do you definitely feel the presence of the living Christ within you?

A. If it is the historical Jesus surnamed Christ, I must say I do not. If it is an adjective signifying one of the names of God, then I must say I do feel the presence of God—call him Christ, call him Krishna, call him Rama. We have one thousand names to denote God, and if I did not feel the presence of God within me, I see so much of misery and disappointment every day that I would be a raving maniac and my destination would be the Hoogli.[8]

In the midst of humiliation and so-called defeat and a tempestuous life, I am able to retain my peace because of

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an undying faith in God, translated as Truth. We can describe God as millions of things, but I have for myself adopted the simple formula—Truth is God. But several American friends say to me: 'You cannot have peace unless you believe in Jesus.' Well, I tell you I have peace, though I do not believe in Jesus as the only son of God.[9]

The Message of Jesus

THE message of Jesus, as I understand it, is contained in his *Sermon on the Mount* unadulterated and taken as a whole, and even in connection with the *Sermon on the Mount,* my own humble interpretation of the message is in many respects different from the orthodox. The message, to my mind, has suffered distortion in the West. It may be presumptuous for me to say so, but as a devotee of truth, I should not hesitate to say what I feel. I know that the world is not waiting to know my opinion on Christianity.

One's own religion is, after all, a matter between oneself and one's Maker and no one else's, but if I feel impelled to share my thoughts with you, it is because I want to enlist your sympathy in my search for Truth and because so many Christian friends are interested in my thoughts on the teachings of Jesus. If then I had to face only the *Sermon on the Mount* and my own interpretation of it, I should not hesitate to say: 'Oh yes, I am a Christian.' But I know that, at the present moment, if I said any such thing, I would lay myself open to the gravest misinterpretation. I should lay myself open to fraudulent claims, because I would have then to tell you what my own meaning of Christianity is, and I have no desire myself to give you my own view of Christianity. But, negatively, I can tell you that, in my humble opinion, much of what passes as Christianity is a negation of the *Sermon on the Mount.* And, please, mark my words!

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I am not, at the present moment, speaking of Christian conduct. I am speaking of the Christian belief, of Christianity as it is understood in the West. I am painfully aware of the fact that conduct everywhere falls far short of belief. But I don't say this by way of criticism. I know from the treasures of my own experience that, although I am every moment of my life trying to live up to my professions, my conduct falls short of these professions. Far, therefore, be it from me to say this in a spirit of criticism. But I am placing before you my fundamental difficulties. When I began as a prayerful student of the Christian literature in South Africa in 1893, I asked myself: 'Is this Christianity'? and have always got the Vedic answer: '*Neti, Neti*' (not this, not this). And the deepest in me tells me that I am right.

I claim to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I was cut to pieces, God would give me the strength not to deny Him and to assert that He is. The Muslim says: He is and there is no one else. The Christian says the same thing and so the Hindu. And, if I may say so, even the Buddhist says the same thing, if in different words. We may, each of us, be putting our own interpretation on the word 'God'—God who embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but millions and billions of such globes. How can we, little crawling creatures, so utterly helpless as He has made us, how can we possibly measure His greatness, His boundless love, His infinite compassion, such that He allows man insolently to deny Him, wrangle about Him, and cut the throat of his fellowman? How can we measure the greatness of God who is so forgiving, so divine?

Thus, though we may utter the same words they have not the same meaning for us all. And hence I say that we do not need to proselytize or do *Shuddhi* or *Tabligh*

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through our speech or writing. We can only do it really with our lives. Let them be open books for all to study. Would that I could persuade the missionary friends to take this view of their mission. Then there will be no distrust, no suspicion, no jealousy and no dissensions.

Confuse not Jesus' teaching with what passes as modern civilization, and pray do not do unconscious violence to the people among whom you cast your lot. It is no part of that call, I assure you, to tear the lives of the people of the East by its roots. Tolerate whatever is good in them and do not hastily, with your preconceived notions, judge them. Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves. In spite of your belief in the greatness of Western civilization and in spite of your pride in all your achievements, I plead with you for humility and ask you to leave some little room for doubt, in which, as Tennyson sang, there was more truth, though by 'doubt' he no doubt meant a different thing. Let us each one live our life, and if ours is the right life, where is the cause for hurry? It will react of itself.[10]

The Jesus I Love

I SHALL tell you how, to an outsider like me, the story of Christ, as told in the *New Testament*, has struck. My acquaintance with the *Bible* began nearly forty-five years ago, and that was through the *New Testament*. I could not then take much interest in the *Old Testament*, which I had certainly read, if only to fulfil a promise I had made to a friend whom I happened to meet in a hotel. But when I came to the *New Testament* and the *Sermon on the Mount*, I began to understand the Christian teaching, and the teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount* echoed something I had learnt in childhood and something which seemed to be part of my being and which I felt was being acted up to in the daily life around me.

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I say it seemed to be acted up to, meaning thereby that it was not necessary for my purpose that they were actually living the life. This teaching was non-retaliation, or non-resistance to evil. Of all the things I read, what remained with me forever was that Jesus came almost to give a new law—though he, of course, had said he had not come to give a new law, but tack something on to the old Mosaic law. Well, he changed it so that it became a new law—not an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but to be ready to receive two blows when one was given, and to go two miles when you were asked to go one.

I said to myself: "This is what one learns in one's childhood. Surely, this is not Christianity. For, all I had then been given to understand was that to be a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. The *Sermon on the Mount*, however, falsified the impression.

As my contact with real Christians, *i.e.*, men living in fear of God, increased, I saw that the *Sermon on the Mount* was the whole Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is that *Sermon* which has endeared Jesus to me.

I may say that I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived, and what was narrated in the *Gospels* was a figment of the writer's imagination. For, the *Sermon on the Mount* would still be true for me.

Reading, therefore, the whole story in that light, it seems to me that Christianity has yet to be lived, unless one says that where there is boundless love and no idea of retaliation whatsoever, it is Christianity that lives. But, then, it surmounts all boundaries and book-teaching. Then,

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it is something indefinable, not capable of being preached to men, not capable of being transmitted from mouth to mouth, but from heart to heart. But Christianity is not commonly understood in that way.

Somehow, in God's providence, the *Bible* has been preserved from destruction by the Christians so-called The British and Foreign Bible Society has had it translated into many languages. All that may serve a real purpose in the time to come. Two thousand years in the life of a living faith may be nothing. For, though we sing: "All glory to God on High and on the earth be peace," there seems to be today neither glory to God nor peace on earth.

As long as it remains a hunger still unsatisfied, as long as Christ is not yet born, we have to look forward to him. When real peace is established, we will not need demonstrations, but it will be echoed in our life, not only in individual life but in corporate life. Then, we shall say Christ is born. Then, we will not think of a particular day in the year as that of the birth of Christ, but as an ever-recurring event which can be enacted in every life.

And the more I think of fundamental religion, and the more I think of miraculous conceptions of so many teachers who have come down from age to age and clime to clime, the more I see that there is behind them the Eternal Truth that I have narrated. That needs no label or declaration. It consists in the living of life, never ceasing, ever progressing towards peace.

When, therefore, one wishes "A Happy Christmas" without the meaning behind it, it becomes nothing more than an empty formula. *And unless one wishes for peace for all life, one cannot wish for peace for onself.* It is a well-evident axiom like the Axioms of Euclid, that one cannot have peace unless there is in one an intense longing

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for peace all around. You may certainly experience peace in the midst of strife, but that happens only when to remove strife you destroy your whole life, you crucify yourself.

And so, as the miraculous birth is an eternal event, so is the Cross an eternal event in this stormy life. Therefore, we dare not think of birth without death on the Cross. Living Christ means a living Cross; without it, life is living death.[11]

My Regard for the Life of Jesus

MY regard for the life of Jesus is indeed very great. His ethical teaching, his common sense, his sacrifice command my reverence. But I do not accept the orthodox teaching that Jesus was or is God incarnate in the accepted sense, or that he was or is the only son of God. I do not believe in the doctrine of appropriation of another's merit. His sacrifice is a type and an example for us. Every one of us has to be 'crucified' for salvation. I do not take the words 'Son', 'Father' and 'the Holy Ghost' literally. They are all figurative expressions. Nor do I accept the limitations that are sought to be put upon the teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount.* I can discover no justification in the *New Testament* for wars. I regard Jesus as one among the most illustrious teachers and prophets the world has seen. Needless to say, I do not regard the *Bible* as an infallible record of the life and teachings of Jesus. Nor do I consider every word in the *New Testament* as God's own word. Between the *Old* and the *New,* there is a fundamental difference. Whilst the *Old* contains some very deep truths, I am unable to pay it the same honours I pay the *New Testament.* I regard the latter as an extension of the teaching of the *Old* and in some matters rejection of the *Old.* Nor do I regard the *New* as the last word of God. Religious ideas, like everything else,

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are subject to the same law of evolution that governs everything else in this Universe. Only God is changeless; and as His message is received through the imperfect human medium, it is always liable to suffer distortion in proportion as the medium is pure or otherwise. I would, therefore, respectfully urge my Christian friends and well wishers to take me as I am. I respect and appreciate their wish that I should think and be as they are, even as I respect and appreciate a similar wish on the part of my Mussalman friends. I regard both the religions as equally true with my own. But my own gives me full satisfaction. It contains all that I need for my growth. It teaches me to pray not that others may believe as I believe, but that they may grow to their full height in their own religion. My constant prayer, therefore, is for a Christian or a Mussalman to be a better Christian and a better Mohammedan. I am convinced, I know, that God will ask, asks us now, not what we label ourselves, but what we are, *i.e.* what we do. With Him *deed* is everything; *belief* without deed is nothing. With Him, doing is believing.[12]

Teachings of Jesus

Q. What is your attitude towards the teachings of Jesus Christ?

A. They have an immense moral value for me, but I do not regard everything said in the *Bible* as the final word of God or exhaustive or even acceptable from the moral standpoint. I regard Jesus Christ as one of the greatest teachers of mankind, but I do not consider him to be the only son of God.' Many passages in the *Bible* are mystical. For me 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life'.[13]

I consider Jesus Christ as a historical person—one of the greatest amongst the teachers of mankind. I have

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studied his teachings as prayerfully as I could, with the reverence of a Christian, in order to discover the Truth that is buried in them. I have done so, just as I have done about the teachings of other teachers.[14]

Jesus, then, to me is a great world teacher among others. He was to the devotees of his generation no doubt 'the only begotten son of God'. Their belief need not be mine. He affects my life no less because I regard him as one among the many begotten sons of God. The adjective 'begotten' has, for me, a deeper and possibly a grander meaning than its literal meaning. For me, it implies spiritual birth. In his own times, he was the nearest to God.

Jesus atoned for the sins of those who accepted his teachings by being an infallible example to them. But the example was worth nothing to those who never troubled to change their lives. A regenerate outgrows the original taint, even as purified gold outgrows the original alloy.

I have made the frankest admission of my many sins. But I do not carry their burden on my shoulders. If I am journeying Godward, as I feel I am, it is safe with me. For, I feel the warmth of the sunshine of His presence. My austerities, fastings and prayers are, I know, of no value, if I rely upon them for reforming me. But they have an inestimable value, if they represent, as I hope they do, the yearnings of a soul striving to lay his weary head in the lap of his Market.[15]

The Gospel of Christ

Lady Emily: Jesus Christ was the son of God.

Gandhiji: And so are we!

Lady Emily: No, he was the *only* son of God.

Gandhiji: It is there that the mother (she) and son (Gandhiji) must differ. With you Jesus was the only be-

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gotten son of God. With me he was a son of God, no matter how much purer than us all. But every one of us is a son of God and capable of doing what Jesus did, if we but endeavour to express the Divine in us.

Lady Emily : Yes, that is where I think you are wrong. If you accepted Christ in your heart and appealed to your people to do likewise, you could deliver your message with greater ease and far better effect. He is our salvation, and without receiving him in our hearts we cannot be saved.

Gandhiji : So, those who accept the Christ are all saved They need do nothing more?

Lady Emily : We are sinners all and we have but to accept him to be saved.

Gandhiji : And then we may continue to be sinners? Is that what you mean? You do not, I hope, belong to the Plymouth Brothers, do you?

Lady Emily : No, I am a Presbyterian.

Gandhiji : But you talk like some of the Plymouth Brothers I met long ago in South Africa.

Lady Emily : Yes, I am afraid you were so unfortunate in the Christian contacts you formed in South Africa. You did not meet the right kind of people.

Gandhiji : Surely, you will not say that. I met a number of estimable people. They were all honest and sincere.

Lady Emily : But they were not *true* Christians.

Gandhiji : Do you know F. W. Meyer ?

Lady Emily : Oh, yes.

Gandhiji : Well, then, let me tell you that it was F. W. Meyer, who, after a long talk with me, asked the other Christian friends to let me alone. He said to them that I was as good as converted, and that I did not need any formal process of conversion. But, of course, that did not satisfy them. And old A. W. Baker, who must be much

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over eighty now, is still at me. He writes to remind me time and again that unless I accept Christ in his way, I cannot be saved.

Lady Emily: The *Bible* has been translated into several hundred languages, and the heathen in the remotest parts of the world, who knew not a syllable of English, is agreeably surprised to find God's message delivered to him in his own dialect.

Gandhiji: That proves nothing.

Lady Emily: And, then, whereas fifty years ago there were so many hundred thousand Christians in India, there are today ten times as many.

Gandhiji: Again that proves nothing. But why all this quarrel about labels? Cannot a few hundred thousand Indians or Africans live the message of Christ without being called Christians?

Lady Emily: No, for without the grace of Jesus one cannot be saved. One has to accept Christ in one's heart. That is the definition of a true Christian, and I admit there are very few Christians today.[16]

Some Posers

'A well wisher' sends these lines for my meditation:

> "The *Bible* can be read in 566 languages. In how many can the *Upanishads* and the *Gita?*
>
> "How many leper asylums and institutions for the depressed and the distressed have the missionaries? How many have you?"

It is usual for me to receive such posers. 'A well wisher' deserves an answer. I have great regard for the missionaries for their zeal and self-sacrifice. But I have not hesitated to point out to them that both are often misplaced. What though the *Bible* were translated in every tongue in the world? Is a patent medicine better than the *Upanishads* for being advertised in more languages

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than the *Upanishads*? An error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody will see it.

The *Bible* was a greater power when the early fathers preached it than it is today. 'A well wisher' has little conception of the way truth works, if he thinks that the translation of the *Bible* in more languages than the *Upanishads* is any test of its superiority. Truth has to be lived if it is to fructify. But if it is any satisfaction to 'A well wisher' to have my answer, I may gladly tell him that the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* have been translated into far fewer languages than the *Bible*. I have never been curious enough to know in how many languages they are translated.

As for the second question, too, I must own that the missionaries have founded many leper asylums and the like. I have founded none. But I stand unmoved. I am not competing with the missionaries or anybody else in such matters. I am trying humbly to serve humanity as God leads me. The founding of leper asylums etc., is only one of the ways, and, perhaps, not the best, of serving humanity. But even such noble service loses much of its nobility when conversion is the motive behind it. That service is the noblest which is rendered for its own sake. But let me not be misunderstood. The missionaries that selflessly work away in such asylums command my respect. I am ashamed to have to confess that Hindus have become so callous as to care little for the waifs and strays of India, let alone the world.[17]

Jesus' Part In My Life

Q. What part did Jesus play in your life?

A. Jesus played a great part in my life—unconsciously how much, I do not know; consciously how much, I do know. When I began to read the *Sermon on the*

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Mount I felt the beauty of it, though I am not able to say that it is singular or is not to be found in other religions. But the presentation is unique and not to be found in any other faith. In South Africa, at the instance of friends, I had to read a lot of Christian books. I saw the beauties of Christianity. So many of my words are chosen from the *Bible*. In my talks, I can't avoid reference to the *Bible*. I won't be able to speak without referring to it.

Q. How does the person of Jesus affect your life?

A. Not in any special sense. I don't look upon Jesus as the only son of God. Taken in a literal sense, God begets no son; or, if He begets at all, He begets not one son. In a spiritual sense you can say so. But in that sense we are all sons of God, if we want to make that claim. Jesus was one of the prophets mankind has seen. He is one of the teachers of the world. I don't put him outside or above the other teachers. I don't consider him a special favourite of God. The person of Jesus is a living reality in this sense. But if Jesus lives in this sense, so do other great souls in the world. They affect us because they are still living. Jesus thus is not living in a special sense of the word distinguished from others.

Q. Do you refer to the Krishna of history when generally you refer to him?

A. I don't speak of the Krishna of history. I know Krishna not as a historical figure, but as an embodiment of perfection. This conception has revolutionized Hinduism. How it acts is more than I can say, and nobody can explain it. The spirit of Hinduism has evolved this idea. Hinduism is still in the process of evolution. Infact, all religions are evolving. Hinduism, if not Zoroastrianism, is of all living religions the oldest. They are all undergoing evolution. Krishna, as an incarnation of God, has transformed the lives of tens of thousands of men. It is a

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patent, historical fact. That transformation is going on even at present. Similarly, you don't know the Jesus of history. He exists in the pages of histories. Gibbon and Farrar have given their own records about him. Whom am I to believe? It is not Jesus of history who really rules over the lives of Christians; it is the Jesus of their own imagination who does so. The God of my imagination rules my life, and not the God of your imagination. Thousands of people believe not in the Krishna of my imagination, but in the Krishna of their imagination. A time comes when the whole thing transcends reason. Krishna has transformed the lives of tens of thousands of men, and many instances of this transformation can be cited. The same is true of other teachers of mankind.[18]

What Jesus Means to Me

ALTHOUGH I have devoted a large part of my life to the study of religion and to discussion with religious leaders of all faiths, I know very well that I cannot but seem presumptuous in writing about Jesus Christ and trying to explain what he means to me. I do so only because my Christian friends have told me on more than a few occasions that for the very reason I am not a Christian and that (I shall quote their words exactly) "I do not accept Christ in the bottom of my heart as the only son of God," it is impossible for me to understand the profound significance of his teachings, or to know and interpret the greatest source of spiritual strength that man has ever known.

Although this may or may not be true in my case, I have reasons to believe that it is an erroneous point of view. I believe that such an estimate is incompatible with the message that Jesus Christ gave to the world. For, he was certainly the highest example of one who wished to give everything, asking nothing in return, and not caring what creed might happen to be professed by the recipient.

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I am sure that if he were living here now among men, he would bless the lives of many who perhaps have never even heard his name, if only their lives embodied the virtues of which he was a living example on earth; the virtues of loving one's neighbour as oneself and of doing good and charitable works among one's fellowmen.

What, then, does Jesus mean to me? To me he was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To his believers, he was God's only begotten son. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of his teaching and of his doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so.

To me, it (the word 'begotten') implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of his nearness to God; that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see him and recognize him as the son of God.

But I do believe that something of this spirit that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure, in its most profound human sense, does exist. I must believe this; if I did not believe it, I should be a sceptic; and to be a sceptic is to live a life that is empty and lacks moral content. Or, what is the same thing, to condemn the entire human race to a negative end.

It is true that there certainly is reason for scepticism when one observes the bloody butchery that European aggressors have unloosed, and when one thinks about the misery and suffering prevalent in every corner of the world, as well as the pestilence and famine that always follow, terribly and inevitably, upon war.

In the face of this, how can one speak seriously of the Divine Spirit incarnate in man? Because these acts

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of terror and murder offend the conscience of man; because man knows that they represent evil; because in the inner depths of his heart and of his mind, he deplores them. And because, moreover, when he does not go astray, misled by false teachings or corrupted by false leaders, man has within his breast an impulse for good and a compassion that is the spark of Divinity, and which some day, I believe, will burst forth into the full flower that is the hope of all mankind.

An example of this flowering may be found in the figure and in the life of Jesus. I refuse to believe that there now exists or has ever existed a person that has not made use of his example to lessen his sins, even though he may have done so without realizing it. The lives of all have, in some greater or lesser degree, been changed by his presence, his actions, and the words spoken by his divine voice.

I believe that it is impossible to estimate the merits of the various religions of the world, and, moreover, I believe that it is unnecessary and harmful even to attempt it. But each one of them, in my judgment, embodies a common motivating force: the desire to uplift man's life and give it purpose.

And because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that he belongs not solely to Christianity but to the entire world, to all races and people, it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.[19]

Distortion of Jesus' Message

AN English friend has been at me for the past thirty years, trying to persuade me that there is nothing but damnation in Hinduism and that I must accept Christianity. When I was in jail I got, from separate sources, no

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less than three copies of *The Life of Sister Therese*, in the hope that I should follow her example and accept Jesus as the only begotten son of God and my Saviour. I read the book prayerfully, but I could not accept even St. Therese's testimony for myself. I must say I have an open mind, if indeed at this stage and age of my life I can be said to have an open mind on this question. Anyway, I claim to have an open mind in this sense that, if things were to happen to me as they did to Saul before he became Paul, I should not hesitate to be converted.

But today I rebel against orthodox Christianity, as I am convinced that it has distorted the message of Jesus. He was an Asiatic whose message was delivered through many media; and when it had the backing of a Roman Emperor, it became an imperialist faith as it remains to this day. Of course, there are noble but rare exceptions like Andrews and Elwin. * But the general trend is as I have indicated.[20]

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*Verrier Elwin once wrote to Gandhiji to say that a bishop called him a traitor to Christ and did not permit him to preach in churches. To him, Gandhiji replied as follows :

"I wish you will not take to heart what the bishop has been saying. Your church is in your heart. Your pulpit is the whole earth. The blue sky is the roof of your church. And what is this Catholicism? It is surely of the heart. The formula has its use. But it is made by man. If I have any right to interpret the message of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels, I have no manner of doubt in my mind that it is in the main denied in the churches, whether Roman or English, High or Low. Lazarus has no room in those places. This does not mean that the custodians know that the Man of Sorrows has been banished from the buildings called Houses of God. In my opinion, this excommunication is the surest sign that the truth is in you and with you. But my testimony is worth nothing, if, when you are alone with your Maker, you do not hear His voice saying: 'Thou art on the right path.' That is the unfailing test and no other."

The Diary of Mahadev Desai: p. 87.

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Jesus caught a breath of wind from Asia and gave it to the world. It has been diluted in the West. You incorporated it into a system alien to it. That's why I call myself not Christian, because I do not hold with the systems you've set up, based on might. India's contribution to the world is to show this fallacy. The slopes of the Himalayas are white with the bones of our *Rishis*, who have given their lives to prayer, study and research. They have been trying for centuries to wrest the secrets of God from Him, and what they tell us is: 'Truth is God, and the way to Him is Non-violence'.[21]

Why I Did Not Become a Christian

Gandhiji : I did once seriously think of embracing the Christian faith. The gentle figure of Christ, so patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught his followers not to retaliate when abused or struck, but to turn the other cheek—I thought it was a beautiful example of the perfect man.

Mrs. Polak : But you did not embrace Christianity, did you?

Gandhiji : No. I studied your Scriptures for some time and thought earnestly about them. I was tremendously attracted to Christianity but, eventually, I came to the conclusion that there was nothing really in your Scriptures that we had not got in ours, and that to be a good Hindu also meant that I would be a good Christian. There was no need for me to join your creed to be a believer in the beauty of the teachings of Jesus or to try to follow his example.

Mrs. Polak : Of course, it is what a man is that counts, not what he calls himself. But, tell me, do you believe in conversion, in changing from one form of faith to another?

Gandhiji : What do you feel yourself?

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Mrs. Polak: It does not please me, somehow. I could not do it.

Gandhiji: I think that is right. If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of the others too. There is only one God, but there are many paths to Him.

Mrs. Polak: If *Karma* and reincarnation be true, we are born into the faith to which we belong, and the one most suitable at the moment for our development. So, we should not change.

Gandhiji: What do you think is the essential lesson for man in the teaching of Christianity?

Mrs. Polak: I could think of two or three; but the one that stands out strongest in my mind at the moment is *Love* which is expressed in the words: 'One is your Master, Christ, and all ye are brethren.'

Gandhiji: Yes, and Hinduism teaches the same great truth; and Mohammedanism and Zoroastrianism, too.

Mrs. Polak: Do you think Hinduism does teach 'All men are Brothers', as Christianity does?

Gandhiji: Do not take men's imperfect interpretation, as you see it, for the real teaching of any great faith. You would not suggest to me that the Christian world lives as brothers, would you? Think of its wars, its hatreds, its poverty and its crime!

Mrs. Polak: That is true. I suppose the ideals of mankind are always far ahead of them, and men and women are very much the same in whatever part of the world you find them.

Gandhiji: If we realized our ideals, they would cease to be ideals. We should have nothing to strive for.[18]

Between the ideal and practice there always must be an unbridgeable gulf. The ideal will cease to be one, if it becomes possible to realize it. The pleasure lies in mak-

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ing the effort, not in its fulfilment. For, in our progress towards the goal, we ever see more and more enchanting scenery.[23]

God is Not Encased in a Safe

MRS. SATYAVATI CHIDAMBAR, an Indian Christian, wrote to Gandhiji suggesting that he should accept Christ, and give him a chance in his heart and in his life, for one cannot be an orthodox Hindu and follow the principles in the "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus was the only Saviour of the world. To her Gandhiji replied as follows:

Dear Sister: I have your letter. Why do you think that the truth lies only in believing in Jesus as you do? Again, why do you think that an orthodox Hindu cannot follow out the precepts of the *Sermon on the Mount*? Are you sure of your knowledge of an orthodox Hindu? And, then again, are you sure that you know Jesus and his teachings? I admire your zeal but I cannot congratulate you upon your wisdom. My forty-five years of prayer and meditation have not only left me without the assurance of the type you credit yourself with, but has left me humbler than ever. The answer to my prayer is clear and emphatic that God is not encased in a safe to be approached only through a little hole in it, but that He is open to be approached through billions of openings by those who are humble and pure of heart. I invite you to step down from your pinnacle where you have left room for none but yourself. With love and prayer.

Yours sincerely,
M. K. GANDHI.[24]

To the Christian Missionaries

NOT many of you perhaps know that my association with Christians,—not Christians so-called but real Christians, dates from 1889 when as a lad I found myself in London;

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and that association has grown riper as years have rolled on. In South Africa, where I found myself in the midst of inhospitable surroundings, I was able to make hundreds of Christian friends. I came in touch with the late Mr. Spencer Watton, Director of South Africa General Mission, and, later, with the great divine Rev. Mr. A. Murray and several others.

My acquaintance, therefore, with so many missionaries is by no means a new thing. There was even a time in my life when a very sincere and intimate friend of mine, a great and good Quaker, had designs on me. He thought that I was too good not to become a Christian. I was sorry to have disappointed him. One missionary friend of mine in South Africa still writes to me and asks me: 'How is it with you'? I have always told this friend that, so far as I know, it is all well with me. If it was prayer that these friends expected me to make, I was able to tell them that every day the heartfelt prayer within the closed door of my closet went to the Almighty to show me light and give wisdom and courage to follow that light.

In answer to promises made to one of these Christian friends of mine, I thought it my duty to see one of the biggest of Indian Christians, as I was told he was,—the late Kali Charan Banerjee. I went over to him—I am telling you of the deep search that I have undergone in order that I might leave no stone unturned to find out the true path—I went to him with an absolutely open mind and in a receptive mood, and I met him also under circumstances which were most affecting. I found that there was much in common between Mr. Banerjee and myself. His simplicity, his humility, his courage, his truthfulness, all these things I have all along admired. He met me when his wife was on her death-bed. You cannot imagine a more

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impressive scene, a more ennobling circumstance. I told Mr. Banerjee : 'I have come to you as a seeker'—this was in 1901—'I have come to you in fulfilment of a sacred promise I have made to some of my dearest Christian friends that I will leave no stone unturned to find out the true light.' I told him that I had given my friends the assurance that no worldly gain would keep me away from the light, if I could but see it. Well, I am not going to engage you in giving a description of the little discussion that we had between us. It was very good, very noble. I came away, not sorry, not dejected, not disappointed, but I felt sad that even Mr. Banerjee could not convince me. This was my final, deliberate striving to realize Christianity as it was presented to me. Today, my position is that though I admire much in Christianity, I am unable to identify myself with orthodox Christianity. I must tell you in all humility that Hinduism; as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being; and I find a solace in the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the *Sermon on the Mount*. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the *Sermon on the Mount* have not left a deep impression upon me, but I must confess to you that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

All Religions Are Right

I HAVE told you all these things in order to make it absolutely clear to you where I stand, so that I may have, if you will, closer touch with you. I must add that I did

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not stop at studying the *Bible* and the commentaries and other books on Christianity that my friends placed in my hands; but I said to myself, if I was to find my satisfaction through reasoning, I must study the scriptures of other religions also and make my choice. And I turned to the *Quran*. I tried to understand what I could of Judaism as distinguished from Christianity. I studied Zoroastrianism and I came to the conclusion that all religions were right, but every one of them imperfect, imperfect naturally and necessarily, because they were interpreted with our poor intellects, sometimes with our poor hearts, and more often misinterpreted. In all religions I found, to my grief, that there were various and even contradictory interpretations of some texts, and I said to myself: 'Not these things for me. If I want the satisfaction of my soul, I must feel my way. I must wait silently upon God and ask Him to guide me.' There is a beautiful verse in Sanskrit which says: 'God helps only when man feels utterly helpless and utterly humble'. When I was studying Tamil, I found in one of the books of Dr. Pope a Tamil proverb which means 'God helps the helpless'. I have given you this life-story of my own experience for you to ponder over.

Man is Not Vile

YOU, the missionaries, come to India thinking that you come to a land of heathens, of idolators, of men who do not know God. One of the greatest of Christian divines, Bishop Heber, wrote the two lines which have always left a sting with me :

> 'Where every prospect pleases,
> And Man alone is vile'.

I wish he had not written them. My own experience, in my travels throughout India, has been to the contrary. I have gone from one end of the country to the other, without any prejudice, in a relentless search after Truth, and

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I am not able to say that here in this fair land, watered by the great Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Jumna, man is vile. He is not vile. He is as much a seeker after Truth as you and I are, possibly more so. This reminds me of a French book translated for me by a French friend. It is an account of an imaginary expedition in search of knowledge. One party landed in India and found Truth and God personified in a little *Pariah's* hut. I tell you there are many such huts belonging to the untouchables where you will certainly find God. They do not reason, but they persist in their belief that God is. They depend upon God for His assistance and find it, too. There are many stories told throughout the length and breadth of India about these noble untouchables. Vile as some of them may be, there are noblest specimens of humanity in their midst. But does my experience exhaust itself merely with the untouchables? No. I am here to tell you that there are non-*Brahmins*, there are *Brahmins* who are as fine specimens of humanity as you will find in any place on the earth. There are *Brahmins* today in India who are embodiments of self-sacrifice, godliness, and humility. There are *Brahmins* who are devoting themselves body and soul to the service of untouchables, with no expectation of reward from the untouchables, but with execration from orthodoxy. They do not mind it, because in serving *Pariahs* they are serving God. I can quote chapter and verse from my experience. I place these facts before you in all humility for the simple reason that you may know this land better, the land to which you have come to serve. You are here to find out the distress of the people of India and remove it. But I hope you are here also in a receptive mood and if there is anything that India has to give, you will not stop your ears, you will not close your eyes and steel your hearts, but open up your ears, eyes

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and, most of all, your hearts to receive all that may be good in this land. I give you my assurance that there is a great deal of good in India. Do not flatter yourselves with the belief that a mere recital of that celebrated verse in St. John makes a man a Christian. If I have read the *Bible* correctly, I know many men who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ or have even rejected the official interpretation of Christianity will, probably, if Jesus came in our midst today in the flesh, be owned by him more than many of us. I, therefore, ask you to approach the problem before you with open-heartedness and humility.

Privilege of Service

IF you will refuse to see the other side, if you will refuse to understand what India is thinking, then you will deny yourselves the real privilege of service. I have told my missionary friends: 'Noble as you are, you have isolated yourselves from the people whom you want to serve.' I cannot help recalling to you the conversation I related in Darjeeling at the Missionary Language School. Lord Salisbury was waited upon by a deputation of missionaries in connection with China, and this deputation wanted protection. I cannot recall the exact words, but give you the report of the answer Lord Salisbury gave. He said: 'Gentlemen, if you want to go to China to preach the message of Christianity, then do not ask for assistance of temporal power. Go with your lives in your hands and if the people of China want to kill you, imagine that you have been killed in the service of God.' Lord Salisbury was right. Christian missionaries come to India under the shadow, or, if you like, under the protection of a temporal power, and it creates an impassable bar.

If you give me statistics that so many orphans have been reclaimed and brought to the Christian faith I would accept them, but I do not feel convinced thereby that it

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is your mission. In my opinion, your mission is infinitely superior to that. You want to find men in India and if you want to do that, you will have to go to the lowly cottages not to give them something, might be to take something from them. A true friend as I claim to be of the missionaries of India and of the Europeans, I speak to you what I feel from the bottom of my heart. I miss receptiveness, humility, willingness on your part to identify yourselves with the masses of India. I have talked straight from my heart. May it find a response from your hearts![25]

Give up Proselytizing

IF there is any substance in what I have said, will not the great missionary bodies of India, to whom she owes a deep debt of gratitude for what they have done and are doing, do still better and serve the spirit of Christianity better by dropping the goal of proselytizing while continuing their philanthropic work? I hope you will not consider this to be an impertinence on my part. I make the suggestion in all sincerity and with due humality. Moreover, I have some claim upon your attention.

I have endeavoured to study the *Bible*. I consider it as part of my scriptures. The spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount* competes almost on equal terms with the *Bhagavad Gita* for the domination of my heart. I yield to no Christian in the strength of devotion with which I sing '*Lead Kindly Light*' and several other inspired hymns of a similar nature. I have come under the influence of noted Christian missionaries belonging to different denominations. And I enjoy to this day the privilege of friendship with some of them. You will perhaps, therefore, allow that I have offered the above suggestion not as a biased Hindu, but as a humble and impartial student of religion with great leaning towards Christianity. May

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it not be that *'Go ye unto all the world'* message has been somewhat narrowly interpreted and the spirit of it missed? It will not be denied, I speak from experience, that many of the conversions are only so-called. In some cases, the appeal has gone not to the heart but to the stomach. And in every case a conversion leaves a sore behind it which, I venture to think, is avoidable.

Quoting again from experience, a new birth, a change of heart, is perfectly possible in every one of the great faiths. I know I am now treading upon thin ice. But I do not apologize for saying that the frightful outrage that is just going on in Europe, perhaps shows that the message of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Peace, has been little understood in Europe, and that light upon it may have to be thrown from the East.[26]

It is my firm opinion that Europe today represents not the spirit of God or Christianity, but the spirit of Satan. And Satan's successes are the greatest when he appears with the name of God on his lips. Europe is today only nominally Christian. In reality, it is worshiping Mammon. 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom.' Thus really spoke Jesus Christ. His so-called followers measure their moral progress by their material possessions.[27]

Christianity, as it is known and practised today, cannot bring salvation to people. It is my conviction that those who today call themselves Christians do not know the true message of Jesus.[28]

It is a first-class human tragedy that peoples of the earth, who claim to believe in the message of Jesus whom they describe as the Prince of Peace, show little of that belief in actual practice. It is painful to see sincere Christian divines limiting the scope of Jesus' message to

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select individuals. I have been taught from my childhood and tested the truth by experience that the primary virtues of mankind are possible of cultivation by the meanest of the human species. It is this undoubted universal possibility that distinguishes the humans from the rest of God's creation.[29]

Work Away Silently

PROSELYTIZING has done some good, but it has perhaps been outweighed by the evil it has left behind. Whether you profess one religion or another is of no consequence whatsoever. What God will say, and wants us to say, is not what we profess with our lips but what we believe in our heart; and there is no shadow of doubt that there are thousands and thousands of men and women in the world who do not know the *Bible* or the name of Jesus or of his amazing sacrifice, but who are far more God-fearing than many a Christian who knows the *Bible,* offers his prayers regularly and believes sincerely that he follows all the Ten Commandments. Religion is made of sterner stuff, and it is impossible for us frail, weak human beings to understand what people mean when they say that they would be better if they professed something else from what they did. And I recall my conversation with a South African chaplain who, after considerable questioning and cross-questioning, had told me that he would not thenceforth want to convert me. "It is not he who says, 'Lord, Lord'," I told him, "who enters the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth His will." I reminded him: "I am conscious of my weaknesses and try to fight them,—not in my own strength but in the strength of God. Is that enough or do you wish me to repeat parrot-like that Jesus had cleansed me from all sin?" He stopped me and said: "I understand what you mean." So, I say that instead of wanting to find out how many heads you count as Christi-

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an, work away like Sir Gibble silently among the people and let your work be the silent testimony of your worth. What do you want to convert them for? If your contact with them ennobles them, makes them forget untruth, all evil, and brings them a ray of light, is that not enough? Or, in case you have taken charge of an orphan, if you feed him and clothe him, is that not enough? Is that not its own reward? Or, must you have a mechanical confession from him that he is a Christian? We see today a rivalry, a war going on among different religions as to the number of adherents each can boast. I feel deeply humiliated and feel that in every one of the feats we claim to have performed in converting people to our faith, we are denying our God and being untrue to ourselves.[30]

How very nice it would be if the missionaries rendered humanitarian service without the ulterior aim of conversion! But I know that such a revolutionary change in Christian endeavour as I am advocating cannot come through any advice, especially from an outsider, however well meant it may be; it can only come either out of a definite individual conviction, or out of some great mass movement among Christians themselves.[31]

Message of the Bible

IT becomes perhaps necessary to re-read the message of the *Bible* in terms of what is happening around us. The word is the same, but the spirit ever broadens intensively and extensively; and it might be that many things in the *Bible* will have to be re-interpreted in the light of discoveries not of modern science, but in the spiritual field in the shape of direct experiences common to all faiths. The fundamental verses of St. John do require to be re-read and re-interpreted.

I have come to feel that, like us human beings, words have their evolution from stage to stage in the contents

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they hold. For instance, the contents of the richest word — GOD — are not the same to every one of us. They will vary with the experience of each. They will mean one thing to the Santhal and another to his next-door neighbour Rabindranath Tagore. The *Santanist* may reject my interpretation of God and Hinduism. But God Himself is a long-suffering God, who puts up with any amount of abuse and misinterpretations.

If we were to put the spiritual experiences together, we would find a resultant which would answer the cravings of human nature. Christianity is 1900 years old; Islam is 1300 years old; who knows the possibility of either? I have not read the *Vedas* in the original, but have tried to assimilate their spirit and have not hesitated to say that though the *Vedas* may be 13,000 years old, — or even a 1,000,000 years old, as they well may be, for the word of God is as old as God Himself, — even the *Vedas* must be interpreted in the light of our experience. The powers of God should not be limited by the limitations of our understanding. To you, (Missionaries), who have come to teach India, I, therefore, say: "You cannot give without taking. If you have come to give rich treasures of experiences, open your hearts out to receive the treasures of this land, and you will not be disappointed, neither will you have misread the message of the *Bible*."[32]

What Conversion Should Mean

WHEN I was a youth, I remember a Hindu having become a convert to Christianity. The whole town understood that the initiation took the shape of this well-bred Hindu partaking of beef and brandy in the name of Jesus Christ and discarding his national costume. I learnt in later years that such a convert, as so many of my missionary friends put it, came to a life of freedom out of a life of bondage, to a life of plenty out of one of penury. As I

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wander about throughout the length and breadth of India, I see many Christian Indians almost ashamed of their birth, certainly of their ancestral religion, and of their ancestral dress. The aping of Europeans on the part of Anglo-Indians is bad enough, but the aping of them by Indian converts is a violence done to their country and, shall I say, even to their new religion. There is a verse in the *New Testament* to bid Christians avoid meat, if it would offend their neighbours. Meat here, I presume, includes drink and dress. I can appreciate uncompromising avoidance of all that is evil in the old; but where there is not only no question of anything evil but where an ancient practice may be even desirable, it would be a crime to part with it when one knows for certain that the giving up would deeply hurt relatives and friends. Conversion must not mean denationalization. Conversion should mean a definite giving up of the evil of the old, adoption of all the good of the new and a scrupulous avoidance of everything evil in the new. Conversion, therefore, should mean a life of greater dedication to one's own country, greater surrender to God, greater self-purification.[29]

Contribution of Christian Missionaries

Q. I would like to know your very frank evaluation of the work of Christian missionaries in India. Do you believe that Christianity has some contribution to make to the life of our country? Can we do without Christianity?

A. In my opinion, Christian missionaries have done good to us indirectly. Their direct contribution is probably more harmful than otherwise. I am against the modern method of proselytizing. Years' experience of proselytizing, both in South Africa and India, has convinced me that it has not raised the general moral tone of the converts who have imbibed the superficialities of European civilization, and have missed the teaching of Jesus.

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I must be understood to refer to the general tendency and not to brilliant exceptions. The indirect contribution, on the other hand, of Christian missionary effort is great. It has stimulated Hindu and Mussalman religious research. It has forced us to put our own houses in order. The great educational and curative institutions of Christian missions I also count amongst indirect results, because they have been established not for their own sakes, but as an aid to proselytizing.

The world and, therefore, we can no more do without the teaching of Jesus than we can without that of Mohammed or the *Upanishads*. I hold all these to be complementary of one another, in no case exclusive. Their true meaning, their inter-dependence and inter-relation, have still to be revealed to us. We are but indifferent representatives of our respective faiths, which we belie more often than not.[34]

International Fellowship

FELLOWSHIP of Faiths is attainable only by mutual respect in action for (different) faiths.[35]

In order to attain a perfect fellowship, every act of its members must be a religious act and an act of sacrifice. I came to the conclusion long ago, after prayerful search and study and discussion with as many people as I could meet, that all religions were true, and, also, that all had some error in them, and whilst I hold by my own, I should hold others as dear as Hinduism, from which it logically follows that we should hold all as dear as our nearest kith and kin and that we should make no distinction between them. So, we can only pray, if we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become a Hindu; or if we are Mussalmans, not that a Hindu or a Christian should become a Mussalman, nor should we even secretly pray that anyone should be converted, but our inmost prayer should be that

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a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian. That is the fundamental truth of fellowship.

If, however, there is any suspicion in your minds that only one religion can be true and others false, you must reject the doctrine of fellowship. Then, we would have a continuous process of exclusion and found our fellowship on an exclusive basis. Above all, I plead for utter truthfulness. If we do not feel for other religions as we feel for our own, we had better disband ourselves, for we do not want a wishy-washy toleration. My doctrine of toleration does not include toleration of evil, though it does the toleration of the evil-minded. It does not, therefore, mean that you have to invite each and every one who is evil-minded or tolerate a false faith. By a true faith I mean one, the sum total of whose energy is for the good of its adherents; by a false I mean that which is predominantly false. If you, therefore, feel that the sum total of Hinduism has been bad for the Hindus and the world, you must reject it as a false faith.

I would not only not try to convert, but would not even secretly pray that anyone should embrace my faith. My prayer would always be that a Mussalman should be a better Mussalman, or become the best he can. Hinduism, with its message of *Ahimsa*, is to me the most glorious religion in the world—as my wife to me is the most beautiful woman in the world—, but others may feel the same about their own religion. Cases of real honest conversion are quite possible. If some people for their inward satisfaction and growth change their religion, let them do so.[36]

Aim of the Fellowship

THE aim of the Fellowship (of Faiths) should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to

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become a better Mussalman, and a Christian a better Christian. The attitude of patronizing toleration is false to the spirit of International Fellowship. If I have a suspicion in my mind that my religion is more or less true and that others' are more or less false instead of being more or less true, then, though I may have some sort of fellowship with them, it is of an entirely different kind from the one we need in the International Fellowship.

Our prayer for others must be NOT "God, give him the light that Thou hast given me," BUT "Give him all the light and truth he needs for his highest development." Pray merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion. Nevertheless, your experience may become a part of their experience without your knowing it.[37]

Impulse to Proselytize

Q. Is not impulse to proselytize God-given?

A. I question it. But if all impulses are God-given, as some of our Hindus believe, He has also given us discrimination. He will say: I have given you many impulses so that your capacity to face temptation may be tested.

Q. But you do believe in preaching an economic order?

A. I do, as I believe in preaching laws of health.

Q. Then, why not apply the same rule in religious matters?

A. It is a relevant question. But you must not forget that we have started with the fundamental principle that all religions are true. If there were different but good and true health laws for different communities, I should hesitate to preach some as true and some as false. I am positive that with people not prepared to tolerate one

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another's religious belief, there can be no International Fellowship.

Moreover, physical analogies, when applied to spiritual matters, are good only up to a certain point. When you take up an analogy from Nature, you can stretch it only to a certain point. But I would take an illustration from the physical world and explain what I mean. If I want to hand a rose to you, there is a definite movement. But if I want to transmit its scent, I do so without any movement. The rose transmits its own scent without a movement. Let us rise a step higher, and we can understand that spiritual experiences are self-acting. Therefore, the analogy of preaching sanitation, etc., does not hold good. If we have spiritual truth, it will transmit itself. You talk of the joy of a spiritual experience and say you cannot but share it. Well, if it is a real joy, boundless joy, it will spread itself without the vehicle of speech. In spiritual matters, we have merely to step out of the way. Let God work His way. If we interfere, we may do harm. Good is a self-acting force. Evil is not, because it is a negative force. It requires the cloak of virtue before it can march forward.

Q. Did not Jesus Himself teach and preach?

A. We are on dangerous ground here. You ask me to give my interpretation of the life of Christ. Well, I may say that I do not accept everything in the *Gospels* as historical truth. And it must be remembered that he was working amongst his own people, and he said he had not come to destroy but to fulfil. I draw a great distinction between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Letters of Paul.* They are a graft on Christ's teaching, his own gloss apart from Christ's own experience.[38]

Analogy of Fragrance

Q. I am very much attracted by your illustration of

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the smell of a rose. We will all admit that one real proof of the truth of a religion is the fragrance of real spirituality, love, peace, that may emanate from those that hold to that religion. And without that our creeds and professions and preachings of it, even our worship and prayers, will not lead anyone to see that we have "a secret of the Lord" with us.

But does it follow from this that we cannot impart a share of what we rejoice in to others in any other way than as the smell of a rose imparts itself?

A. Let me extend the analogy of fragrance, faulty as all analogies are in their very nature. The rose imparts its fragrance not in many ways but only one. Those who have not the sense of smell will miss it. You cannot feel the fragrance through the tongue or the ear or the skin. So may you not receive spirituality except through the spiritual sense. Hence have all religions recognized the necessity of that sense being awakened. It is a second birth. A man with intense spirituality may without speech or a gesture touch the hearts of millions who have never seen him and whom he has never seen. The most eloquent preacher, if he has not spirituality in him, will fail to touch the hearts of his audience. Therefore, I venture to think that most of the effort of modern missions is not only useless, but more often than not harmful. At the root of missionary effort is also the assumption that one's own belief is true not only for oneself but for all the world; whereas the truth is that God reaches us through millions of ways not understood by us. In missionary effort, therefore, there is lack of real humility that instinctively recognizes human limitations and the limitless powers of God. I have no feeling that from a spiritual standpoint I am necessarily superior to the so-called savage. And spiritual superiority is a dangerous thing to feel. It is not like

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many other things which we can perceive, analyze and prove through our senses. If it is there, I cannot be deprived of it by any power on earth, and it will have its effect in its own due time. But if in matters of medicine and other natural sciences, I feel my superiority over others, a thing of which I may be legitimately conscious, and if I have love for my fellow-beings, I would naturally share my knowledge with them. But things of the spirit I leave to God and thus keep the bond between fellow-beings and myself pure, correct and within limits. But I must not carry this argument any further.[39]

Truth is Self-Propelling

Dr. Mott: Do you, then, disbelieve in all conversion?

Gandhiji: I disbelieve in the conversion of one person by another. My effort should never be to undermine another's faith, but to make him a better follower of his own faith. This implies belief in the truth of all religions and, therefore, respect for them. It again implies true humility, a recognition of the fact that the Divine Light having been vouchsafed to all religions through an imperfect medium of flesh, they must share in more or less degree the imperfection of the vehicle.

Dr. Mott: Is it not our duty to help our fellow-beings to the maximum of truth that we may possess, to share with them our deepest spiritual experiences?

Gandhiji: I am sorry I must again differ from you, for the simple reason that the deepest spiritual truths are always unutterable. That Light to which you refer transcends speech. It can be felt only through the inner experience. And, then, the highest truth needs no communicating, for it is by its very nature self-propelling. It radiates its influence silently as the rose its fragrance without the intervention of a medium.

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Dr. Mott: But even God sometimes speaks through His prophets.

Gandhiji: Yes, but the prophets speak not through the tongue, but through their lives. I have, however, known that in this matter I am up against a solid wall of Christian opinion.

Dr. Mott: Oh, no. Even among Christians there is a school of thought,—and it is growing,—which holds that the authoritarian method should not be employed, but that each individual should be left to discover the deepest truths of life for himself. The argument advanced is that the process of spiritual discovery is bound to vary in the case of different individuals according to their varying needs and temperaments. In other words, they feel that propaganda in the accepted sense of the term is not the most effective method.

Gandhiji: I am glad to hear you say this. That is what Hinduism certainly inculcates.[40]

Preaching the Gospel of Christ

Q. What is the most effective way of preaching the Gospel of Christ?

A. To live the Gospel is the most effective way—most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Preaching jars on me and makes no appeal to me, and I get suspicious of missionaries who preach. But I love those who never preach but live the life according to their lights. Their lives are silent, yet most effective testimonies. Therefore, I cannot say what to preach, but I can say that a life of service and uttermost simplicity is the best preaching. If, therefore, you go on serving people and ask them also to serve, they would understand. But you quote instead John 3 : 16 and ask them to believe it. That has no appeal to me, and I am sure people will not understand it. Where there has been acceptance of the

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Gospel through preaching, my complaint is that there has been some motive.

Q. But we also see it, and we try our best to guard against it.

A. But you can't guard against it. One sordid motive vitiates the whole preaching. It is like a drop of poison which fouls the whole food. Therefore, I should do without any preaching at all. A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon. If it had human understanding and if it could engage a number of preachers, the preachers would not be able to sell more roses than the fragrance itself could do. The fragrance of religious and spiritual life is much finer and subtler than that of the rose.

Q. But we, Christians, feel that we, who have something to share, must share it with others. If we want consolation, we find it from the *Bible*. Now, those who have no solace to get from Hinduism, how are we to meet their spiritual needs?

A. By behaving just like the rose. Does the rose proclaim itself, or is it self-propagated? Has it an army of missionaries proclaiming its beauties?

Q. But supposing some one asked us: 'Where did you get the scent'?

A. The rose, if it had sense and speech, would say: 'Fool, don't you see that I got it from my Maker'?

Q. But if some one asks you: 'Then, is there no book'?

A. You will then say: 'Yes, for me there is the *Bible*.' If they were to ask me, I would present to some the *Quran*, to some the *Gita*, to some the *Bible* and to some Tulsidas' *Ramayana*. I am like a wise doctor prescribing what is necessary for each patient.

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Q. But I find difficulty in getting much from the *Gita.*

A. You may, but I do not find any difficulty in getting much from the *Bible* as well as from the *Quran.*[41]

A Discourse with Christian Friends

Dr. Ceresole: Religion which should bind us divides us. Is it not a sorry spectacle that whilst people of various denominations find no difficulty in working together all day in hearty co-operation, they must disband when the time for prayer comes? Is religion, then, meant to divide us? Must it be allowed to become an expression of conceit rather than of a desire to be of service? I want some sort of religious communion between men of different faiths.

Gandhiji: Quite possible, if there is no mental reservation.

Dr. Ceresole: But a friend of mine, a great humanitarian worker, believes that but for evangelism, he should not have taken up his mission work. He gets the driving power from communion with Jesus, he says, because Jesus was always in communion with God.

Gandhiji: The greatest trouble with us is not that a Christian missionary should rely on his own experience, but that he should dispute the evidence of a Hindu devotee's life. Just as he has his spiritual experience and the joy of communion, even so has a Hindu.

A Christian Missionary: I have not had the time or desire to evangelise. The Church at home would be happy if through our hospital more people would be led to Christian lives.

Gandhiji: But whilst you give the medical help, you expect the reward in the shape of your patients becoming Christians.

A Christian Missionary: Yes, the reward is expected.

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Otherwise there are many other places in the world which need our service. But instead of going there, we come here.

Gandhiji: There is the kink. At the back of your mind there is not pure service for its sake, but the result of service in the shape of many people coming to the Christian fold.

A Christian Missionary: In my own work, there is no ulterior motive. I care for people, I alleviate pain, because I cannot do otherwise. The source of this is my loyalty to Jesus who ministered to suffering humanity. At the back of my mind there is, I admit, the desire that people may find the same joy in Jesus that I find. Where is the kink?

Gandhiji: The kink is in the Church thinking that there are people in whom certain things are lacking, and that you must supply them whether they want them or not. If you simply say to your patients: 'You have taken the medicine I gave you. Thank God, He has healed you. Don't come again,' you have done your duty. But if you also say: 'How nice it would be if you had the same faith in Christianity as I have,' you do not make of your medicine a free gift.

A Christian Missionary: But if I feel that I have something medically and spiritually which I can give, how can I keep it?

Gandhiji: There is a way out of the difficulty. You must feel that what you possess, your patient also can possess but through a different route. You will say to yourself: 'I have come through this route, you may come through a different route.' Why should you want him to pass through your University and no other?

A Christian Missionary: Because I have my partiality for my *Alma Mater.*

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Gandhiji: There is my difficulty. Because you adore your mother, you cannot wish that all the rest were your mother's children.

A Christian Missionary: That is a physical impossibility.

Gandhiji: Then, this one is a spiritual impossibility. God has the whole humanity as His children. How can I limit God's grace by my little mind and say this is the only way?

A Christian Missionary: I do not say it is the only way. There might be a better way.

Gandhiji: If you concede that there might be a better way, you have surrendered your point.

A Christian Missionary: Well, if you say that you have found your way, I am not so terrifically concerned with you. I will deal with one who is floundering in mud.

Gandhiji: Will you judge him? Have you people not floundered? Why will you present your particular brand of truth to all?

A Christian Missionary: I must present to them the medicine I know.

Gandhiji: Then, you will say to him: 'Have you seen your own doctor'? You will send him to his doctor, ask the doctor to take charge of him. You will perhaps consult that doctor, you will discuss with him the diagnosis, and will convince him or allow yourself to be convinced by him. But there you are dealing with a wretched physical thing. Here we are dealing with a spiritual thing where you cannot go through all these necessary investigations. What I plead for is humanity. You do not claim freedom from hypocrisy for the Christian Church?

Dr. Ceresole: Most of us believe our religion to be the best and they have not the slightest idea of what other religions have revealed to their adherents. Dr.—has made

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a careful study of the Hindu scriptures, and he has observed what Hinduism gives to the Hindus.

Gandhiji: I say it is not enough for him to read the *Song Celestial* or the *Quran*. It is necessary for him to read the *Quran* with Islamic spectacles and the *Gita* with Hindu spectacles, just as he would expect me to read the *Bible* with Christian spectacles. I would ask him: 'Have you read the *Gita* as reverently as I have read the *Bible*'? I tell you I have not read as many books on Hinduism as I have about Christianity. And yet I did not come to the conclusion that Christianity or Hinduism was the ONLY way.

A Christian Missionary: Then, what exactly should be the missionaries' attitude?

Gandhiji: I think I have made it clear. But I shall say it again in other words: *Just to forget that you have come to a country of heathens, and to think that they are as much in search of God as you are; just to feel that you are not going there to give your spiritual goods to them, but that you will share your worldly goods of which you have a good stock. You will, then, do your work without a mental reservation and thereby you will share your spiritual treasures.* The knowledge that you have this reservation creates a barrier between you and me.

A Christian Missionary: Do you think that because of what you call that mental reservation, the work that one could accomplish would suffer?

Gandhiji: I am sure. You would not be half as useful as you would be without the reservation. The reservation means that you belong to a different and a higher species, and you make yourself inaccessible to others.

A Christian Missionary: A barrier would be certainly my Western way of living.

Gandhiji: No, that cannot be immediately broken.

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A Christian Missionary: Would you be really happy if we stayed at home?

Gandhiji: I cannot say that. But I will certainly say that I have never been able to understand your going out of America. Is there nothing to do there?

A Christian Missionary: Even in America there is enough scope for educational work.

Gandhiji: That is a fatal confession. You are not a superfluity there. But for the curious position that your Church has taken, you would not be here.

A Christian Missionary: I have come because the Indian women need medical care to a greater extent than American women do. But coupled with that, I have a desire to share my Christian heritage.

Gandhiji: That is exactly the position I have been trying to counter. You have already said that there may be a better way.

A Christian Missionary: No, I meant to say that there may be a better way fifty years hence.

Gandhiji: Well, we were talking of the present, and you said there might be a better way.

A Christian Missionary: No, there is no better way today than the one I am following.

Gandhiji: That is what I say is assuming too much. You have not examined all religious beliefs. But even if you had, you may not claim infallibility. You assume knowledge of all people, which you can do only if you were God. I want you to understand that you are labouring under a double fallacy: That what you think is best for you is really so; and that what you regard as the best for you is the best for the whole world. It is an assumption of omniscience and infallibility. I plead for a little humility.[42]

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True Evangelism

Q. Do you see reason for Christian workers in the West to come here, and if so what is their contribution?

A. In the manner in which they are working, there would seem to be no room for them. Quite unconsciously, they do harm to themselves and so to us. It is, perhaps, impertinent for me to say that they do harm to themselves, but quite pertinent to say that they do harm to us. They do harm to those amongst whom they work and those amongst whom they do not work, *i.e.*, the harm is done to the whole of India. They present a Christianity of their belief, but not the message of Jesus as I understand it. The more I study their activities, the more sorry I become. There is such a gross misunderstanding of religion on the part of those who are intelligent, very far advanced, and whose motives need not be questioned. It is a tragedy that such a thing should happen in the human family.

Q. You are referring to things as they are at present. Do you visualize a situation in which there is a different approach?

A. Your ability is unquestioned. You can utilize all those abilities for the service of India which she would appreciate. That can only happen if there are no mental reservations. If you come to give education, you must give it after the Indian pattern. You should sympathetically study our institutions and suggest changes. But you come with preconceived notions and seek to destroy. If people from the West came on Indian terms, they would supply a felt want. When Americans come and ask me what service they can render, I tell them: 'If you dangle your millions before us, you will make beggars of us and demoralize us.' But in one thing I do not mind being a beggar. I would beg of you your scientific talent. You can ask your engineers and agricultural experts to place

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their services at our disposal. They must not come to us as our lords and masters, but as volunteer workers. A paid servant would throw up his job anyday, but a volunteer worker could not do so. If such come, the more the merrier. A Mysore engineer (who is a Pole) has sent me a box of handmade tools made to suit village requirements. Supposing an engineer of that character comes and studies our tools and our cottage machines and suggests improvements in them, he would be of great service. If you do this kind of work in a religious spirit, you will have delivered the message of Jesus.

Life is More Eloquent Than Lips

Q. Apart from the contribution through the realm of scientific achievement, evangelism seems to you to be out of the question in establishing relationships between East and West.

A. I do say that. But I speak with a mental reservation. I cannot only reconcile myself to—I must recognize—a fact in Nature which it is useless to gainsay—I mean proper evangelization.

When you feel you have received peace from your particular interpretation of the *Bible,* you share it with others. But you do not need to give vocal expression to it. Your whole life is more eloquent than your lips. Language is always an obstacle to the full expression of thought. How, for instance, will you tell a man to read the *Bible* as you read it, how by word of mouth will you transfer to him the light as you receive it from day to day and moment to moment? Therefore, all religions say: 'Your life is your speech.' If you are humble enough, you will say you cannot adequately represent your religion by speech or pen.

Q. But may not one, in all humility, say: 'I know

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that my life falls far short of the ideal, let me explain the ideal I stand for'?

A. No. You bid good-bye to humility the moment you say that life is not adequate and that you must supplement it by speech. Human species need not go to animals and shout to them: 'We are humans.' The animals know them as humans. The language of the soul never lends itself to expression. It rises superior to the body. Language is a limitation of the Truth which can be only represented by life.

Q. How, then, is experience to be passed on from generation to generation without some articulate expression ?

A. There is no occasion for articulate expression. Life is its own expression. I take the simile of the rose I used years ago. The rose does not need to write a book or deliver a sermon on the scent it sheds all around, or on the beauty which everyone who has eyes can see. Well, spiritual life is infinitely superior to the beautiful and fragrant rose, and I make bold to say that the moment there is a spiritual expression in life, the surroundings will readily respond. There are passages in the *Bible*, the *Gita*, the *Bhagvat*, the *Quran*, which eloquently show this. "Wherever," we read, "Krishna appeared, people acted like those possessed." The same thing about Jesus. But, to come nearer home, why are people touched as if by magic wherever Jawaharlal goes? They sometimes do not even know he has come, and yet they take sudden fire from the very thought that he is coming. Now there it may not be described as a spiritual influence, but there is a subtle influence and it is unquestionably there, call it by what name you like. They do not want to hear him, they simply want to see him. And that is natural. You cannot deal with millions in any other way. Spiritual life

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has greater potency than Marconi waves. When there is no medium between me and my Lord and I simply become a willing vessel for His influences to flow into it, then I overflow as the water of the Ganges at its source. There is no desire to speak when one lives the Truth. Truth is most economical of words. There is thus no truer or other evangelism than life.

Q. But if a person were to ask the source of such a life, what then?

A. Then you will speak, but your language will be well thought-out. You will yourself feel that. It defies expression. But then the questioner probes further, if he is a searcher. Then you will draw him to you. You will not need to go to him. Your fame will so spread that people from all parts of the world will flock to see you and listen to you. You will then speak to them. Take Aurobindo Ghose. Many from all parts go to him. He does not even see them, except on two days during the year, and never talks to them.

Q. Do you see any indication that there is a drawing together of those who have intimations of a higher life?

A. Yes. But not through these organizations. They are a bar to the process. Why am I at Sevagram? Because I believe that my message will have a better chance of penetrating the masses of India, and, may be, through them to the world. I am otherwise not a man capable of shutting myself up. But I am so downright natural that once I feel a call I go forward with it, whatever happens... Economy of words and action has, therefore, its value. Only it has to be natural.[43]

If Jesus Came to Earth Again

Q. Why do you object to proselytization as such? Is not there enough in the *Bible* to authorize us to invite people to a better way of life?

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A. Oh yes, but it does not mean that they should be made members of the Church. If you interpret your texts in the way you seem to do, you straightaway condemn a large part of humanity unless it believes as you do. If Jesus came to earth again, he would disown many things that are being done in the name of Christianity. It is not he who says 'Lord, Lord' that is a Christian, but he that does the 'will of the Lord' that is a true Christian. And cannot he, who has not heard the name of Christ Jesus, do the will of the Lord?[44]

'Judge Not Lest Ye Be Judged'

I BELIEVE that there is no such thing as conversion from one faith to another in the accepted sense of the term. It is a highly personal matter for the individual and his God. I may not have any design upon my neighbour as to his faith, which I must honour even as I honour my own. For, I regard all the great religions of the world as true, at any rate for the people professing them, as mine is true for me. Having reverently studied the scriptures of the world, I have no difficulty in perceiving the beauties in all of them. I could no more think of asking a Christian or a Mussalman or a Parsi or a Jew to change his faith than I would think of changing my own. This makes me no more oblivious of the limitations of the professors of those faiths, than it makes me of the grave limitations of the professors of mine. And seeing that it takes all my resources in trying to bring my practice to the level of my faith and in preaching the same to my co-religionists, I do not dream of preaching to the followers of other faiths. 'Judge not lest ye be judged' is a sound maxim for one's conduct. It is a conviction daily growing upon me that the great and rich Christian missions will render true service to India, if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to

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humanitarian service without the ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to Christianity, and destroying their social superstructure, which, notwithstanding its many defects, has stood now from time immemorial the onslaughts upon it from within and from without. Whether they—the missionaries—and we wish it or not, what is true in the Hindu faith will abide, what is untrue will fall to pieces. Every living faith must have within itself the power of rejuvenation if it is to live.[45]

The missionaries have to alter their attitude. Today, they tell people that there is no salvation for them except through the *Bible* and through Christianity.* It is customary to decry other religions and to offer their own as the only one that can bring deliverance. That attitude should be radically changed. Let them appear before the people as they are, and try to rejoice in seeing Hindus become better Hindus and Mussalmans better Mussalmans. Let them start work at the bottom, let them enter into what is best in their life and offer nothing inconsistent with it. That will make their work far more efficacious, and what they will say and offer to the people will be appreciated without suspicion and hostility. In a word, let them go to the people not as patrons but as one of them, not to oblige them but to serve them and to work among them.[46]

No Need of Conversion

I HOLD that proselytizing under the cloak of humanitarian work is, to say the least, unhealthy. It is most certainly

* "I hold that all religions are true but imperfect inasmuch as they are presented through human agency and bear the impress of the imperfections and frailties of the human being. My quarrel with missionaries is that they think no religion other than Christianity is true." —*Harijan*: Feb. 25, 1939.

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resented by the people here. Religion, after all, is a deeply personal matter, it touches the heart. Why should I change my religion because a doctor who professes Christianity as his religion has cured me of some disease, or why should the doctor expect or suggest such a change whilst I am under his influence? Or, why should I, whilst I am in a missionary educational institution, have Christian teaching thrust upon me? In my opinion, these practices are not uplifting and give rise to suspicion if not even secret hostility. The methods of conversion must be, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion. Faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If a man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility, the extent of its influence is far wider than that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals.

I am, then, not against conversion. But I am against the modern methods of it. Conversion nowadays has become a matter of business, like any other. I remember having read a missionary report,* saying how much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a budget for 'the next harvest.'

Yes, I do maintain that India's great faiths are all-sufficing for her. Apart from Christianity and Judaism, Hinduism and its offshoots, Islam and Zoroastrianism are living faiths. No one faith is perfect. All faiths are

* "Thirty-five years ago, for instance, as I was passing through Zanzibar, I went to the Bible Society to purchase a copy of the Bible and with that I was given a report of work done by a mission there. I was astounded to find therein that a missionary could count his work in the terms of £.s.d. A convert meant so many shillings; as to a recruiting agent, a recruit means so many rupees. One cannot think of a religion in terms of the number of its adherents."

—*Harijan* : Sept. 14, 1934.

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equally dear to their respective votaries. What is wanted, therefore, is living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world, and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show the superiority of its faith over the rest. Through such friendly contact, it will be possible for us all to rid our respective faiths of shortcomings and excrescences.

It follows, from what I have said above, that India is in no need of conversion of the kind I have in mind. Conversion, in the sense of self-purification, self-realization, is the crying need of the times. That, however, is not what is ever meant by proselytizing. To those who would convert India, might it not be said: 'Physician, heal thyself?'[47]

India's Religions

Q. I cannot believe that you said: "*Certainly, India's religions are adequate for her people*". What are India's religions"? Do not Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism belong to the world even as Christianity is? Why did Swami Vivekananda go to America with his inspiring message of Hinduism? How could anyone call Islam an "India's religion" and with the same breath say that Christianity is not a religion of India? Religion, I deem, is a matter between an individual and his own conception of Right Conduct. Religion belongs to the great realm of thought and personal experience which knows neither boundaries nor nations.

A. In mentioning Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism etc., as India's religions, I had no desire to claim them as India's exclusively or to exclude Christianity. The issue was Christianity on the one hand claimed as the one true religion, and other religions on the other being regarded as false. In joining issue, I contended that the

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great world religions, other than Christianity, professed in India were no less true than Christianity. It was thus neither relevant nor necessary for me to assert before Christian missionaries and their protagonists that Christianity was true. Moreover, with my known partiality for the *Sermon on the Mount* and my repeated declarations that its author was one of the greatest among the teachers of mankind, I could not suspect that there would be any charge against me of underrating Christianity. As for Christian Indians, I count among them many warm friends and I have had no difficulty whatsoever in establishing friendly touch with the Christian masses wherever I have gone. Nor is there any fear of my estranging even the foreign missionaries among whom I claim many personal friends.

In India under *Swaraj*, I have no doubt that foreign missionaries will be at liberty to do their proselytizing, as I would say, in the wrong way; but they would be expected to bear with those who, like me, may point out that in their opinion the way is wrong.[48]

"Religions of India are adequate for her", this surely means nothing more than that she does not need to change them. But as the context of the article in which the statement occurs shows, it does not mean that the professors of the respective faiths have nothing to learn. If there is sympathetic contact established between the various faiths and no evil designs suspected, each can gain a great deal from the rest. What is resisted is the idea of gaining converts and that, too, not always by fair and open means.[49]

No Conversion Permissible

I HAVE had the privilege of having under me Mussalman, Parsi and Christian minors. Never was Hinduism put before them for the acceptance. They were encour-

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aged and induced to respect and read their own scriptures. It is with pleasure that I can recall instances of men and women, boys and girls having been induced to know and love their faiths better than they did before, if they were also encouraged to study the other faiths with sympathy and respect. We have in the *Ashram* today several faiths represented. No proselytizing is practised or permitted. We recognize that all these faiths are true and divinely inspired, and all have suffered through the necessarily imperfect handling of imperfect men.[50]

Here is Mirabehn.* I would have her find all the spiritual comfort she needs from Christianity, and I should not dream of converting her to Hinduism, even if she wanted to do so. Today it is the case of a grown-up woman like her, tomorrow it may be that of a European child trusted to my care by a friend. Take the case of Khan Saheb's† daughter entrusted to my care by her father. I should jealously educate her in her own faith and should strive my utmost against her being lured away from it, if ever she was so inclined. I have had the privilege of having children and grown-up persons of other faiths with me. I was thankful to find them better Christians, Mussalmans, Parsis or Jews by their contact with me.[51]

For me, all the principal religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity. Hence, I have had no difficulty in bringing up Muslim, Parsi and

* Gandhiji's English disciple Miss Slade, daughter of a British Admiral, who came to stay in his Ashram and was given a Hindu name.—Ed.

† Dr. Khan Saheb, the elder brother of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan—the Frontier Gandhi.—Ed.

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Christian children under my care in their own faith. Indeed, I had to study some literature for their sake when their parents wanted me to teach them particular forms of worship according to special books. The easiest way to find out a man's position is perhaps through his prayer. I suggest the following two forms:—

I

"O God! give all thy creation wisdom, so that each may worship and follow Thee according to his light and grow in his own faith."

II

"O God! give thy creation wisdom, so that each may worship and follow Thee even as I try to do."

It is clear that the first form is all-inclusive and that, therefore, a person or institution that will subscribe to it can conscientiously bring up Hindu wards as Hindus, Muslim as Muslims, etc.; whereas one subscribing to the second form can conscientiously take in only those who belong to his denomination, unless he takes others with the declared intention of converting them to his own denomination.[52]

Proselytization

C. F. Andrews: What would you say to a man who, after considerable thought and prayer, said that he could not have his peace and salvation except by becoming a Christian?

Gandhiji: I would say that if a non-Christian (say a Hindu) came to a Christian and made that statement, he should ask him to become a good Hindu rather than find goodness in change of faith.

C. F. Andrews: I cannot in this go the whole length with you, though you know my own position. I discarded the position that there is no salvation except through

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Christ long ago. But supposing the Oxford Group Movement people changed the life of your son, and he felt like being converted, what would you say?

Gandhiji: I would say that the Oxford Group may change the lives of as many as they like, but not their religion. They can draw their attention to the best in their respective religions, and change their lives by asking them to live according to them. There came to me a man, the son of *Brahmin* parents, who said his reading of your book had led him to embrace Christianity. I asked him if he thought that the religion of his forefathers was wrong. He said 'No'. Then, I said: 'Is there any difficulty about your accepting the *Bible* as one of the great religious books of the world and Christ as one of the great teachers'? I said to him that you had never through your books asked Indians to take up the *Bible* and embrace Christianity, and that he had misread your book — unless, of course, your position is like that of the late Maulana Mohammed Ali's, *viz.*, that a believing Mussalman, however bad his life, is better than a good Hindu.

C. F. Andrews: I do not accept M. Mohammed Ali's position at all. But I do say that if a person really needs a change of faith, I should not stand in his way.

Gandhiji: But don't you see that you do not even give him a chance? You do not even cross-examine him. Supposing, a Christian came to me and said he was captivated by a reading of the *Bhagvat* and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu. I should say to him: 'No. What the *Bhagvat* offers, the *Bible* also offers. You have not yet made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.'

C. F. Andrews: I don't know. If someone earnestly says that he will become a good Christian, I should say:

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'You may become one', though you know that I have in my own life strongly dissuaded ardent enthusiasts who came to me. I said to them: 'Certainly, not on MY account will you do anything of the kind.' But human nature does require a concrete faith.

Gandhiji: If a person wants to believe in the *Bible* let him say so, but why should he disregard his own religion? This proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very personal matter.* We should, by living the life according to our lights, share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God.

Consider whether you are going to accept the position of mutual toleration or of equality of all religions. My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have the innate respect for other religions, as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration, but equal respect.

C. F. Andrews: What do you say, Khansaheb, to all this?

Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Take it from me that the world is never going to have one religion. All religions are equal, all prophets are equal. A true Mussalman, to my mind, is one who carries out the will of *Allah*. I do not know how M. Mohammed Ali came to take up the position he did. I cannot at all accept it. I can never accept a wicked Mussalman as a Mussalman at all, and not worth comparing with Father Elwin or Mahatmaji. The pity is we do not know religion, and if we know the principles, we have no grip on them. All religions are springs running from the same source, and nourish different soils and different people. Why should a Mussalman

* "Religion is essentially an individual matter which each one has to decide for himself." —*Harijan*: Sept. 19, 1939.

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go crazy over making other people Mussalmans, and a Christian over making other people Christians? After all, in spite of all our proselytizing zeal, where are we? What progress have we made?[53]

Christians and Untouchability

Q. If all religions are one in your consideration, are the Christians not entitled to combat untouchability?

A. Not only are the Christians entitled, but it is their duty, to combat untouchability in their own midst. But if the question is that Christians should combat untouchability in Hinduism, my answer is that they simply cannot do it, because untouchables of Hinduism should not be untouchables to Christians. The anti-untouchability movement means weaning Hindus from their error. This cannot be effectively done by non-Hindus, even as Hindus cannot bring about religious reform among Christians or Mussalmans. If the question means that Christians should combat untouchability among Hindus by converting untouchables to Christianity, they do not advance the cause in any shape of form, the cause being reformation among caste-Hindus. If the latter repented of their sin, the Harijans would be delivered from the yoke of untouchability in a moment. Conversion can never do it. It can only add to the prevailing bitterness and introduce a disturbing factor in a situation, which is already bad but which, owing to the work of the Harijan Sevak Sanghs and other movements of internal reform in Hinduism, is steadily improving, untouchability being daily undermined.[54]

If the leaders of different religions in India ceased to compete with one another for enticing Harijans into their fold, it would be well for this unfortunate country. I have the profound conviction that those who are engaged in the competition are not serving the cause of Religion.

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By looking at it in terms of politics or economics, they reduce the religious values, whereas the proper thing would be to estimate politics and every other thing in terms of religion. Religion deals with the science of the soul. Great as the other forces of the world are, if there is such a thing as God, soul force is the greatest of all. We know, as a matter of fact, that the greater the force, the finer it is. Hitherto, electricity has held the field among the finer physical powers. And yet, nobody has seen it except through its wonderful results. Scientific speculation dares to talk of a force finer even than that of electricity. But no instrument devised by man has been able to know anything positive of soul force or spiritual force. It is on that force that the true religious reformer has hitherto relied and never without hope fulfilled. It is that force which will finally govern the welfare of Harijans and everyone else, and confound the calculations of men however gifted they may be intellectually. The reformer, who has entered upon the duty of ridding Hinduism of the disease of untouchability, has to depend in everything he does on that force and nothing else.[55]

Service of Harijans

Dr. Mott: But must we not serve them (Harijans)?

Gandhiji: Of course you will, but not make conversion the price of your service.

Dr. Mott: I agree that we ought to serve them, whether they become Christians or not. Christ offered no inducements. He offered service and sacrifice.

Gandhiji: If Christians want to associate themselves with this reform movement, they should do so without any idea of conversion.

Dr. Mott: Should Christians not preach the *Gospel* with reference to its acceptance?

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Gandhiji: Would you, Dr. Mott, preach the *Gospel* to a cow? Well, some of the untouchables are worse than cows in understanding. I mean they can no more distinguish between the relative merits of Islam and Hinduism and Christianity than can a cow. You can only preach through your life. The rose does not say: 'Come and smell me.'

Dr. Mott: But Christ said: 'Preach and Teach,' and also that Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. There was a day when I was an unbeliever. Then J. E. K. Studd of Cambridge, a famous cricketer, visited my University on an evangelistic mission and cleared the air for me. His life and splendid example alone would not have answered my question and met my deepest need, but I listened to him and was converted. First and foremost, we must live the life; and then by wise and sympathetic unfolding of essential truth, we must shed light on processes and actions and attitudes, and remove intellectual difficulties so that it may lead us into the freedom which is freedom indeed. You do not want the Christians to withdraw tomorrow?

Gandhiji: No. But I do not want you to come in the way of our work, if you cannot help us.

Dr. Mott: The whole Christian religion is the religion of sharing our life, and how can we share without supplementing our lives with words?

Gandhiji: If you must share it with the Harijans, why don't you share it with me, Thakkarbapa and Mahadev? Why should you go to the untouchables and try to exploit this upheaval? Why not come to us instead? I can simply state my belief that what the missionaries are doing today does not show spirituality.[56]

Some More Questions

Q. What do you say to the attempts to convert?

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A. I strongly resent these overtures to utterly ignorant men. I can perhaps understand overtures made to me, as indeed they are being made. For, they can reason with me and I can reason with them. But I certainly resent the overtures made to Harijans. When a Christian preacher goes and says to a Harijan that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God, he will give him a blank stare. Then, he holds out all kinds of inducements which debase Christianity.

Q. Would you say a Harijan is not capable of reason?

A. He is. For instance, if you try to take work out of him without payment, he will not give it. He also has a sense of ethical values. But when you ask him to understand theological beliefs and categories, he will not understand anything. I could not do so even when I was 17 and had a fair share of education and training. The orthodox Hindus have so horribly neglected the Harijan that it is astonishing how he adheres to the Hindu faith. Now I say it is outrageous for others to shake his faith.

Q. What about a man who says he is commanded by God to do violence?

A. There you would not put another God before him. You need not disturb his religion, but you will disturb his reason.

Q. But take Hitler. He says he is carrying out God's behest in persecuting the Jews and killing his opponents.

A. You will not pit one word of God against another word of God. But you will have to bear down his reason. For him, you will have to produce a miracle which you will do when Christians will learn the art of dying without killing in defence of what they hold dearer

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than religion. But we can go on arguing like this endlessly.

Q. Would you say then that your religion is a synthesis of all religions?

A. Yes, if you will. But I would call that synthesis Hinduism, and for you the synthesis will be Christianity. If I did not do so, you would always be patronizing me, as many Christians do now, saying: 'How nice it would be if Gandhi accepted Christianity,' and Muslims would be doing the same, saying: 'How nice it would be if Gandhi accepted Islam'! That immediately puts a barrier between you and me. Do you see that?[57]

A Travesty of Religion

IT is a travesty of religion to seek to uproot from the Harijans' simple minds such faith as they have in their ancestral religion and to transfer their allegiance to another, even though that other may be as good as, and equal to, the original in quality. Though all soils have the same predominant characteristics, we know that the same seeds do not fare equally well in all soils. I have some excellent cotton tree seeds which thrive excellently in certain parts of Bengal. But Miraben has not succeeded as yet in getting the same result from the same seeds in the Varoda soil. But I should be unable to subscribe to the formula, if the attempt was made to advance it, that the Varoda soil is inferior to the Bengal soil. But my fear is that though Christian friends nowadays do not say or admit that Hindu religion is untrue, they must harbour in their breasts the belief that Hinduism is an error and that Christianity, as they believe it, is the only true religion. . . . One could understand the attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would do

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helpful constructive work which would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism from the very foundation and replace it by another faith. It is like an attempt to destroy a house which, though badly in want of repair, appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder, he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer to do so themselves. But he would most decidedly resist those who sought to destroy the house that had served well him and his ancestors for ages, unless he, the dweller, was convinced that the house was beyond repair and unfit for human habitation. If the Christian world entertains that opinion about the Hindu house, 'Parliament of Religions' and 'International Fellowship' are empty phrases. For, both the terms presuppose equality of status, a common platform. There cannot be common platform as between inferiors and superiors, or the enlightened and un-enlightened, the regenerate and the unregenerate, the high-born and the low-born, the caste-man and the outcaste.[58]

Christianity and Hinduism

A Roman Catholic Father: If Hinduism became monotheistic, Christianity and Hinduism can serve India in co-operation.

Gandhiji: I would love to see the co-operation happen, but it cannot if the present-day Christian missions persist in holding up Hinduism to ridicule and saying that no one can go to Heaven unless he renounces and denounces Hinduism. But I can conceive a good Christian, silently working away, and shedding the sweet aroma of his life on Hindu communities, like the rose which does not need any speech to spread its fragrance, but spreads it because it must. Even so a truly spiritual life. Then, surely, there would be peace on earth and goodwill among men.

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But not so long as there is militant or 'muscular' Christianity. This is not to be found in the *Bible*, but you find it in Germany and other countries.

A Roman Catholic Father: But if Indians begin to believe in one God and give up idolatry, don't you think the whole difficulty will be solved?

Gandhiji: Will the Christians be satisfied with it? Are they all united?

A Roman Catholic Father: Of course, all the Christian sects are not united.

Gandhiji: Then, you are asking only a theoretical question. And may I ask you: Is there any amalgamation between Islam and Christianity, though both are said to believe in one God? If these two have not amalgamated, there is less hope of amalgamation of Christians and Hindus along the lines you suggest. I have my own solution, but, in the first instance, I dispute the description that Hindus believe in many gods and are idolaters. They do say there are many gods, but they also declare unmistakably that there is one God, God of gods. It is, therefore, not proper to suggest that Hindus believe in many gods. They certainly believe in many worlds. Just as there is a world inhabited by men, and another by beasts, so also is there one inhabited by superior beings called gods, whom we do not see but who, nevertheless, exist. The whole mischief is created by the English rendering of the word देव or देवता (*deva* or *devata*) for which you have not found a better term than 'god'. But god is *Ishwara, Devadhideva*, God of gods. So, you see it is the word 'God' used to describe different divine beings that has given rise to such confusion. I believe that I am a thorough Hindu, but I never believe in many Gods. Never even in my childhood did I hold that belief, and no one ever taught me to do so.

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As for idol-worship, you cannot do without it in some form or other. Why does a Mussalman give his life for defending a mosque which he calls a house of God? And why does a Christian go to a church, and when he is required to take an oath he swears by the *Bible*? Not that I see any objection to it. And what is it if not idolatry to give untold riches for building mosques and tombs? And what do the Roman Catholics do when they kneel before Virgin Mary and before saints – quite imaginary figures in stone or painted on canvas or glass?

A Roman Catholic Father: But I keep my mother's photo and kiss it in veneration of her. But I do not worship it, nor do I worship saints. When I worship God, I acknowledge Him as Creator and greater than any human being.

Gandhiji: Even so, it is not the stone we worship, but it is God we worship in images of stone or metal, however crude they may be.

A Roman Catholic Father: But villagers worship stones as God.

Gandhiji: No, I tell you they do not worship anything that is less than God. When you kneel before Virgin Mary and ask for her intercession, what do you do? You ask to establish contact with God through her. Even so, a Hindu seeks to establish contact with God through a stone image. I can understand your asking for the Virgin's intercession. Why are Mussalmans filled with awe and exultation when they enter a mosque? Why, is not the whole universe a mosque? But I understand and sympathize with the Muslims. It is their way of approach to God. The Hindus have their own way of approach to the same Eternal Being. Our media of approach are different, but that does not make Him different.

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A Roman Catholic Father: But the Catholics believe that God revealed to them the true way.

Gandhiji: But why do you say that the will of God is expressed only in one book called the *Bible* and not in others? Why do you circumscribe the power of God?

A Roman Catholic Father: But Jesus proved that he had received the word of God through miracles.

Gandhiji: But that is Mohammed's claim, too. If you accept Christian testimony, you must accept Muslim testimony and Hindu testimony, too.

A Roman Catholic Father: But Mohammed said he could not do miracles.

Gandhiji: No. He did not want to prove the existence of God by miracles. But he claimed to receive messages from God.[59]

Right and Duty

WHEN duty becomes a right, it ceases to be a duty. Performance of a duty requires one quality — that of suffering and introspection. Exercise of a right requires a quality that gives power to impose one's will upon the resister, through sanctions devised by the claimant or the law whose aid he invokes in the exercise of his right I have the duty of paying my debt, but I have no right to thrust the owed coppers (say) into the pocket of an unwilling creditor. The duty of taking spiritual message is performed by the messenger becoming a fit vehicle by prayer and fasting. Conceived as a right, it may easily become an imposition on unwilling parties.... In the spiritual sphere, there is no such thing as a right.[60]

A Christian Missionary: Have I not a moral right to speak?

Gandhiji: It is not a moral right, but a legal right. There is no right but is legal. Divorced from legality,

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moral right is a misnomer. And, therefore, you either enforce a right or fight for it. Whereas nobody asserts one's duty. He humbly performs it. I shall take an illustration. You are here. You feel like preaching to me the Gospel. I deny the right and ask you to go away. If you regard praying for me a duty, you will quietly go away and pray for me. But if you claim the right to preach to me, you will call the police and appeal to them for preventing my obstructing you. That leads to a clash. But your duty no one dare question. You perform it here or elsewhere, and if your prayers to God to change my heart are genuine, God will change my heart. What Christianity, according to my interpretation of it, expects you to do is to pray to God to change my heart. Duty is a debt. Right belongs to a creditor, and it would be a funny thing indeed if a devout Christian claimed to be a creditor.

Spread Your Perfume

A Christian Missionary: You have objected to Christian propaganda on the ground that Harijans are illiterate and ignorant. What would you say of propaganda amongst non-Harijans?

Gandhiji: I have the same objection, because the vast mass of people of India would not understand the *pros* and *cons of* Christianity better than a cow. I repeat this simile in spite of the fact that it has been objected to. When I say I do not understand logarithms any better than my cow, I do not mean any insult to my intelligence. In matters of theology, the non-Harijan masses can understand no better than Harijans. I would take you to Segaon and show you that there is no distinction, so far as capacity to understand such things is concerned, between Harijans and non-Harijans. Try to preach the principles

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of Christianity to my wife. She can understand them no better than my cow. I can, because of the training that I have had.

A Christian Missionary: But we do not preach any theology. We simply talk of the life of Christ and tell them what a comfort his life and teaching have been to us. He has been our guide, we say, and ask others also to accept him as their guide.

Gandhiji: Oh yes, you do say that. But when you say I must accept Jesus in preference to Ramakrishna Paramhamsa, you will have to go into deep waters. That is why I say, let your life speak to us, even as the rose needs no speech but simply spreads its perfume. Even the blind who do not see the rose perceive its fragrance. That is the secret of the Gospel of the Rose. But the Gospel that Jesus preached is more subtle and fragrant than the Gospel of the Rose. If the rose needs no agent, much less does the Gospel of Christ need any agent.

The Mental Reservation

A Christian Missionary: But, then, your objection is to the commercial aspect of the Christian propaganda. Every true Christian will agree that no baits should be offered.

Gandhiji: But what else is Christianity as it is preached nowadays? Not unless you isolate the proselytizing aspect from your educational and medical institutions are they any worth. Why should students attending Mission schools and colleges be compelled or even expected to attend *Bible* classes? If they must understand the message of Jesus, why not also of Buddha, Zoroaster and Mohammed? Why should the bait of education be offered for giving education?

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A Christian Missionary: That was the old way, not the modern way.

Gandhiji: I can cite to you any number of modern examples.

A Christian Missionary: But where there is no compulsion to attend the *Bible* classes, and only education is given, what objection is there to educational institutions run by Missions?

Gandhiji: There is a subtle kind of propaganda when you expect students to attend *Bible* classes.

A Christian Missionary: As regards hospitals, I think philanthropy without the dynamic of some religious teaching will not tell.

Gandhiji: Then you commercialize your gift, for, at the back of your mind is the feeling that because of your service some day the recipient of the gift will accept Christ. Why should not your service be its own reward?

A Christian Missionary: But leave alone these. I think I can cite instances of exceptionally fine people who attract people to them by the example of their lives.

Gandhiji: I, too, can cite such instances. Andrews is one such. But they are exceptions.

A Christian Missionary: But, then, you must judge Christianity by its best representatives, and not the worst.

Gandhiji: I am not judging Christianity as a religion. I am talking of the way Christianity is being propagated, and you cannot judge it by exceptions. No, let us think of the bulk of your people who preach the Gospel. Do they spread the perfume of their lives? That is to me the sole criterion. All I want them to do is to live Christian lives, not to annotate them. I have come to this view after laborious and prayerful search, and I am glad

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to say that there is a growing body of Christians who accept my view.[61]

Contribution of Christianity

THE history of India would have been written differently, if the Christians had come to India to live their lives in our midst and permeate ours with their aroma, if there was any. There would, then, have been mutual goodwill and utter absence of suspicion. But say some of them: 'If what you say had held good with Jesus, there would have been no Christians.' To answer this would land me in a controversy in which I have no desire to engage. But I may be permitted to say that Jesus preached not a new religion but a new life. He called men to repentance. It was he who said: "Not every one that saith unto me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven."[62]

Q. What, then, is the contribution of Christianity to the national life of India? I mean the influence of Christ as apart from Christianity, for, I am afraid, there is a wide gulf separating the two at present.

A. Aye, there lies the rub. It is not possible to consider the teaching of a religious teacher apart from the lives of his followers. Unfortunately, Christianity in India has been inextricably mixed up for the last one hundred and fifty years with the British rule. It appears to us as synonymous with materialistic civilization and imperialistic exploitation by the stronger White races of the weaker races of the world. Its contribution to India has been, therefore, largely of a negative character. It has done some good in spite of its professors. It has shocked us into setting our own house in order. Christian mis-

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sionary literature has drawn pointed attention to some of our abuses and set us athinking.[63]

Life of the Spirit

SPIRITUAL needs cannot be supplied through the intellect or through the stomach, even as the needs of the body cannot be supplied through the spirit. One can paraphrase the famous saying of Jesus and say: 'Render unto the body that which is its, and unto the spirit that which is its.' And, the only way I can supply my neighbour's spiritual needs is by living the life of the spirit, without even exchanging a word with him. The life of the spirit will translate itself into acts of love for my neighbour.

Presentation, with a view to conversion, of a faith other than one's own, can only necessarily be through an appeal to the intellect or the stomach or both. I do maintain that the vast mass of Indian humanity, cannot understand the presentation of Christianity, and that, generally speaking, their conversion wherever it has taken place has not been a spiritual act in any sense of the term. They are conversions for convenience. And I have had overwhelming corroboration of the truth during my frequent and extensive wanderings.[64]

It is one thing to preach one's religion to whomsoever may choose to adopt it, another to entice masses. And if those thus enticed, on being undeceived, go back to their old love, their return will give natural joy to those whom they had forsaken.[65]

If a person, through fear, compulsion, starvation or for material gain or consideration, goes over to another faith, it is a misnomer to call it conversion. Most cases of mass conversions have been to my mind false coin. Real conversion springs from the heart and at the prompt-

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ing of God, not of a stranger. The voice of God can always be distinguished from the voice of man. And, as I believe in the equality of all the great religions of the earth, I regard no man as polluted because he has forsaken the branch on which he was sitting and gone over to another of the same tree. If he comes back to the original branch, he deserves to be welcomed and not told that he had committed a sin by reason of his having forsaken the family to which he belonged. In so far as he may be deemed to have erred, he has sufficiently purged himself of it when he repents of the error and retraces his step.[66]

Why May I Not Share?

Q. Why may not I share with others my experience of Jesus Christ, which has given me such an ineffable peace?

A. Because you cannot possibly say that what is best for you is best for all. Quinine may be the only means of saving life in your case, but a dangerous poison in the case of another. And again, is it not superarrogation to assume that you alone possess the key to spiritual joy and peace, and that an adherent of a different faith cannot get the same in equal measure from a study of his scriptures? I enjoy a peace and equanimity of spirit which has excited the envy of many Christian friends.

Your difficulty lies in your considering the other faiths as false, or so adulterated as to amount to falsity. And you shut your eyes to the Truth that shines in the other faiths and which gives equal joy and peace to their votaries. I have not hesitated, therefore, to recommend to my Christian friends a prayerful and sympathetic study of the other scriptures of the world. I can give my own humble testimony that, whilst such study has enabled

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me to give the same respect to them that I give to my own, it has enriched my own faith and broadened my vision.

Q. What would be your message to a Christian like me and my fellows?

A. Become worthy of the message that is imbedded in the *Sermon on the Mount*.[67]

Less of Theology – More of Truth

THERE should be less of theology and more of truth in all that you say and do. Amongst agents of the many untruths that are propounded in the world, one of the foremost is theology. I do not say that there is no demand for it. There is a demand in the world for many a questionable thing. But even those who have to do with theology as part of their work, have to survive their theology. I have two good Christian friends who gave up theology and decided to live the Gospel of Christ.

Q. Are you sure that no great result has come through your own study of Jesus?

A. Why? There is no doubt that it has come, but not, let me tell you, through theology or through the ordinary interpretation of theologists. For, many of them contend that the *Sermon on the Mount* does not apply to mundane things, and that it was only meant for the twelve disciples. Well, I do not believe this. I think the *Sermon on the Mount* has no meaning, if it is not of vital use in everyday life to everyone.

Q. Is there not to be found a solution of the present-day problems in the teachings of Jesus?

A. Well, you are now dragging me in deeper waters and you will drown me![68]

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The Gospel of Christ

Q. Could you tell me the things one should avoid in order to present the Gospel of Christ?

A. Cease to think that you want to convert the whole world to your interpretation of Christianity. At the end of reading the *Bible*, let me tell you, it did not leave on my mind the impression that Jesus ever meant Christians to do what the bulk of those who take his name do. The moment you adopt the attitude I suggest, the field of service becomes limitless. You limit your own capacity by thinking and saying that you must proselytize.

Q. You are living a guided life. Could you kindly tell me your experience of guidance?

A. I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself. Therefore, it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He, therefore, does not rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise, I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that He rules our actions, and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The free will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.

Q. Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God?

A. I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger I appreciate that freedom, as I have imbibed through and through the central teach-

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ing of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.[69]

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CHAPTER VI

HINDUISM

Hinduism of My Conception

HINDUISM is based on the firm foundation of Truth and Non-violence and, therefore, there is no room in it for conflict with other religions.

It must be the daily prayer of every adherent of the Hindu faith that every known religion of the world should grow from day to day and should serve the whole of humanity.[1]

No religion which is narrow and which cannot satisfy the test of reason will survive the coming reconstruction of society in which the values will have changed and character, not possession of wealth, title or birth will be the sole test of merit. The Hinduism of my conception is no narrow creed. It is a grand evolutionary process, as ancient as time, and embraces the teachings of Zoroaster, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Nanak and other prophets that I could name. It is thus defined:

विद्वद्भि सेवितः सद्भिनित्यमद्वेषरागिभिः ।
हृदयेनाभ्यनुज्ञातो यो धर्मस्तं निबोधतः ॥

[Know that to be (true) religion which the wise and the good and those who are ever free from passion and hate follow and which appeals to the heart.]

If it is not that, it will perish.[2]

Two Aspects

THERE are two aspects of Hinduism. There is, on the one hand, the historical Hinduism with its untouchability, superstitious worship of stocks and stones, animal sacrifice and so on. On the other, we have the Hinduism of the

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Gita, the *Upanishads* and *Patanjali's Yoga Sutra* which is the acme of *Ahimsa* and oneness of all creation, pure worship of one Immanent, Formless, Imperishable God. *Ahimsa*, which to me is the chief glory of Hindus, has been sought to be explained away by our people as being meant for *sannyasis* only. I do not share that view. I have held that it is *the* way of life and India has to show it to the world.[3]

Distinctive Contribution

THE most distinctive and the largest contribution of Hinduism to India's culture is the doctrine of *Ahimsa*. It has given a definite bias to the history of the country for the last three thousand years and over, and it has not ceased to be a living force in the lives of India's millions even today. It is a growing doctrine, its message is still being delivered. Its teaching has so far permeated our people that an armed revolution has almost become an impossibility in India, not because, as some would have it, we, as a race, are physically weak, for it does not require much physical strength so much as a devilish will to press a trigger to shoot a person, but because the tradition of *Ahimsa* has struck deep root among the people.[4]

I have been asked wherefrom in Hinduism I have unearthed *Ahimsa*. I say that *Ahimsa* is in Hinduism, it is in Christianity as well as in Islam. Whether you agree with me or not, it is my bounden duty to preach what I believe to be the truth as I see it. I am also sure that *Ahimsa* has never made anyone a coward.[5]

My claim to Hinduism has been rejected by some, because I believe and advocate non-violence in its extreme form. They say that I am a Christian in disguise. I have been even seriously told that I am distorting the meaning of the *Gita*, when I ascribe to that great poem the teach

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ing of unadulterated non-violence. Some of my Hindu friends tell me that killing is a duty enjoined by the *Gita* under certain circumstances. A very learned *Shastri* only the other day scornfully rejected my interpretation of the *Gita* and said that there was no warrant for the opinion held by some commentators that the *Gita* represented the eternal duel between forces of evil and good, and inculcated the duty of eradicating evil within us without hesitation, without tenderness.

My religion is a matter solely between my Maker and myself. If I am a Hindu, I cannot cease to be one even though I may be disowned by the whole of the Hindu population. I do, however, suggest that non-violence is the end of all religions.[6]

Teaching of Hinduism

I HAVE admitted in my introduction to the *Gita*, known as *Anasaki Yoga*, that it is not a treatise on non-violence, nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism, as it is practised today, or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the *Gita* and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the *Quran* or the *Bible*. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The *Gita* itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to *Karma, Sannyasa, Yajna*, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the *Gita* has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the *Gita* put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured, in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what

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is more, in the light of my own experiences, in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the *Gita*, to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time, they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one Living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the *Gita* is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories, as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. Anyway, I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the *Gita* to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions are an outcome of a study of the *Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads,* etc.[7]

The Teaching of the Gita

Dr. Kagawa: I am told you recite the *Bhagavad Gita* daily?

Gandhiji: Yes, we finish the entire *Gita* reading once every week.

Dr. Kagawa: But, at the end of the *Gita,* Krishna recommends violence.

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Gandhiji: I do not think so. I am also fighting. I should not be fighting effectively if I were fighting violently. The message of the *Gita* is to be found in the Second Chapter of the *Gita* where Krishna speaks of the balanced state of mind, of mental equipoise. In 19 verses at the close of the 2nd Chapter of the *Gita*, Krishna explains how this state can be achieved. It can be achieved, he tells us, after killing all your passions. It is not possible to kill your brother after having killed all your passions. I should like to see that man dealing death—who has no passions, who is indifferent to pleasure and pain, who is undisturbed by the storms that trouble mortal man. The whole thing is described in language of beauty that is unsurpassed. These verses show that the fight Krishna speaks of is a spiritual fight.

Dr. Kagawa: To the common mind, it sounds as though it was actual fighting.

Gandhiji: You must read the whole thing dispassionately in its true context. After the first mention of fighting, there is no mention of fighting at all. The rest is a spiritual discourse.

Dr. Kagawa: Has anybody interpreted it like you?

Gandhiji: Yes. The fight is there, but the fight as it is going on within. The Pandavas and Kauravas are the forces of good and evil within. The war is the war between Jekyll and Hyde, God and Satan, going on in the human breast. The internal evidence in support of this interpretation is there in the work itself and in the *Mahabharata* of which the *Gita* is a minute part. It is not a history of war between two families, but the history of man—the history of the spiritual struggle of man. I have sound reasons for my interpretation.

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Dr. Kagawa : That is why I say it is your interpretation.

Gandhiji : But that is nothing. The question is whether it is a reasonable interpretation, whether it carries conviction. If it does, it does not matter whether it is mine or X., Y., Z.'s. If it does not, it has no value even if it is mine.

Dr. Kagawa : To my mind Arjuna's ideas are wonderful. Krishna has found some excuse for him, and it was natural and necessary before Christianity.

Gandhiji : This interpretation is even historically wrong. For, Buddha existed long before the Christian era, and he preached the doctrine of non-violence.

Dr. Kagawa : But Arjuna's views seem to me to be superior to Krishna's.

Gandhiji : Then, according to you, the disciple was greater than the master!

Dr. Kagawa : But I agree with your teaching of non-violence. I shall read the *Gita* again, bearing your interpretation in mind.[8]

Central Teaching of the Gita

Q. Is the central teaching of the *Gita* selfless action or non-violence?

A. I have no doubt that it is *Anasakti*—selfless action. Indeed, I have called my little translation of the *Gita* '*Anasaktiyoga.*' And, *Anasakti* transcends *Ahimsa.* He who would be *Anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is, therefore, a necessary preliminary, it is included in *Anasakti,* it does not go beyond it.

Q. Then, does the *Gita* teach *Himsa* and *Ahimsa* both?

A. I do not read that meaning in the *Gita.* It is quite likely that the author did not write it to inculcate

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Ahimsa, but as a commentator draws innumerable interpretations from a poetic text, even so I interpret the *Gita* to mean that, if its central theme is *Anasakti,* it also teaches *Ahimsa.* Whilst we are in the flesh and tread the solid earth, we have to practise *Ahimsa.* In the life beyond, there is no *Himsa* or *Ahimsa.*

Q. But Lord Krishna actually counters the doctrine of *Ahimsa.* For, Arjuna utters this pacifist resolve:

> "Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,
> To face them weaponless, and bare my breast
> To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow."

And Lord Krishna teaches him to 'answer blow with blow'.

A. There I join issue with you. Those words of Arjuna were words of pretentious wisdom. 'Until yesterday', says Krishna to him, 'you fought your kinsmen with deadly weapons without the slightest compunction. Even today, you would strike if the enemy was a stranger and not your own kith and kin!' The question before him was not of non-violence, but whether he should slay his nearest and dearest.[9]

Scriptures Not to be Taken Literally

MANY of us make the very serious mistake of taking literally what is accepted as scriptures, forgetting that the letter killeth and the spirit giveth life. The *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* are neither history, nor simple religious maxims. They appear to me to be wonderfully designed to illustrate the religions history of man in a variety of ways. The heroes described therein are all imperfect mortals, even as we are—the differences being one of degree only. Their alleged actions are not infallible guides for us. The *Mahabharata* sums up its teachings

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by declaring emphatically that Truth outweighs everything else on earth.

But I do not seek to justify everything written under the name of scriptures. I take, as all to be true must take, the sum total of the effect produced on me by a prayerful reading of such books. Thus, I hold that my belief in Truth and Non-violence is derived from, and based on, the scriptural teaching of the very books from which the correspondent presents me with conundrums. Nay more, my belief today having become part of my fundamental being is capable of standing independent of these books or any other. Surely, there must come a time in the life of a very religiously-minded man when his faith must be self-sustained.[10]

'Hindu' and 'Hinduism'

SANATANA Hindu *Dharma* is not circumscribed like the proverbial frog in the well. It is as broad as the ocean. Thus interpreted, it is the property of all mankind, no matter by what name it is called. A Malyali commentator of the great epic the *Mahabharata* has, in my opinion, correctly called it the history of mankind. But be it as it may, the word 'Hindu' is not derived from Sanskrit. The foreigners called the inhabitants on this side of the river Sindhu, Hindus. We have adopted the title. Manu is not the name of any one man. It is an equivalent of Adam, the first man. The Law of Manu is known as *Manava Dharma Shastra* (the Law for Mankind). It is given by the first man under inspiration. One can only guess as to how many of the *Shlokas* are the original work of Manu and how many are interpolations. Dr. Bhagvandas has pointed out certain interpolations. The Arya Samaj looks upon certain others as such. There has been some difference of opinion even on the interpretations.

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In my opinion, whatever out of them appeals to the head and heart of the wise, is the Law for Mankind. There is, therefore, always room for addition or subtraction. The *Shlokas* looked upon as interpolations are the result of the efforts, successful or unsuccessful, of the reformers in different ages. Such a Law belongs to all mankind. It does not permit of discrimination on grounds of caste and class. It knows no distinctions between the Hindus, the Muslims and the others. "This is mine and that is someone else's is the calculation of narrow minds", is one of the pearls of wisdom.[11]

What is a Hindu?

Q. What is a Hindu? What is the origin of the word? Is there any Hinduism?

A. These are pertinent questions for the time. I am no historian, I lay claim to no learning. But I have read in some authentic book on Hinduism that the word 'Hindu' does not occur in the *Vedas*, but when Alexander—the Great invaded India, the inhabitants of the country to the east of the Sindhu, which is known by English-speaking Indians as the Indus, were described as Hindus. The letter 'S' had become 'H' in Greek. The religion of these inhabitants became Hinduism and, as we know it, it is a most tolerant religion. It gave shelter to the early Christians who had fled from persecution, also to the Jews known as Beni-Israel, as also to the Parsis. I am proud to belong to this Hinduism which is all-inclusive, and which stands for tolerance. Aryan scholars swear by what they call the *Vedic* religion, and Hindustan is otherwise known as *Aryavarta*. Hinduism of my conception is all-sufficing for me. It certainly includes the *Vedas*, but it includes also much more. I can detect no inconsistency in declaring that I can, without in any way whatsoever impairing the

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dignity of Hinduism, pay equal homage to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. Such Hinduism will live as long as the sun shines. Tulsidas has summed it up in one *doha:*

> "The root of religion is embedded in mercy, whereas egotism is rooted in love of the body. Tulsi says that mercy should never be abandoned, even though the body perishes."[12]

The Hindu Creed

IT is the good fortune or the misfortune of Hinduism that it has no official creed. In order, therefore, to protect myself against any misunderstanding, I have said Truth and Non-violence is my creed. If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: search after Truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe even in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after Truth; and if today it has become moribund, inactive, irresponsive to growth, it is because we are fatigued; and as soon as the fatigue is over, Hinduism will burst forth upon the world with a brilliance perhaps unknown before. Of course, therefore, Hinduism is the most tolerant of all religions. Its creed is all-embracing. But to claim that is to claim superiority for the Hindu creed over all the other creeds of the world. As I write these lines, I feel a crowd of sectarians whispering to me: "That is no Hinduism you are defining; come to us and we will show you the Truth." I am confounding all these whisperers by saying: 'नेति, नेति,' 'not that, this duelling—this war of words? I can show you a way out of it. It lies through silent prayer." For the moment, my friends, not that,' and they make confusion worse con-

founded by retorting with redoubled fury: 'Not that, not that.' But still another voice whispers to me: "Why all

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I propose to listen to that voice and observe silence and ask my friends to do likewise. Possibly, I have failed to convince them and their co-sharers in their opinion. If I have failed to convince, it is because I have not seen the light.[13]

My Feeling for Hinduism

I CAN no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. Not that she has no fault. I daresay she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so, I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me so much as the music of the *Gita* or the *Ramayana* by Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath, the *Gita*, was my solace.[14]

In my opinion, the beauty of Hinduism lies in its all-embracing inclusiveness. What the divine author of the *Mahabharata* said of his great creation is equally true of Hinduism. What of substance is contained in any other religion is always to be found in Hinduism. And what is not contained in it is insubstantial or unnecessary.[15]

Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it, there is room for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith or *Dharma*, and so it lives at peace with all the religions.[16]

Hinduism has become a conservative religion and, therefore, a mighty force. It is the most tolerant because it is non-proselytizing, and it is as capable of expansion

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today as it has been found to be in the past.... A Hindu refuses to change his religion, not necessarily because he considers it to be the best, but because he knows that he can complement it by introducing reforms. And what I have said about Hinduism is, I suppose, true of the other great faiths of the world, only it is held that it is specially so in the case of Hinduism.[17]

The Hindu does not consider any other man's religion as inferior to his own and try to convert him. Christians look upon Christ as God, and think it idolatry to institute a comparison between Christ and any other person or to ascribe to anybody else the special attributes of Christ. Muslims do not look upon Mohammed as God and consider it idolatry to think of any person or thing as God. However, they are idolatrous worshippers of the Prophet. And God being immanent in the entire universe, inanimate as well as animate, the question of deifying any person or thing does not arise. Every person has something of the Divine in him. Some have more of it, while others have less.[18]

Speciality of Hinduism

Q. What is the speciality of Hinduism for which a Hindu need cling to it?

A. It is an invidious question. Perhaps, it is also profitless. But I must answer it, if only to show what I mean by religion. The closest, though very incomplete, analogy for religion I can find is marriage. It is or used to be an indissoluble tie. Much more so is the tie of religion. And just as a husband does not remain faithful to his wife, or wife to her husband, because either is conscious of some exclusive superiority of the other over the rest of his or her sex but because of some indefinable but irresistible attraction, so does one remain irresistibly

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faithful to one's own religion and find full satisfaction in such adhesion. And just as a faithful husband does not need, in order to sustain his faithfulness, to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider others to be inferior to his own. To pursue the analogy still further, even as faithfulness to one's wife does not presuppose blindness to her shortcomings, so does not faithfulness to one's religion presuppose blindness to the shortcomings of that religion. Indeed, faithfulness, not blind adherence, demands a keener perception of shortcomings and, therefore, a livelier sense of the proper remedy for their removal. Taking the view I do of religion, it is unnecessary for me to examine the beauties of Hinduism. The reader may rest assured that I am not likely to remain Hindu, if I was not conscious of its many beauties. Only for my purpose they need not be exclusive. My approach to other religions, therefore, is never as a fault-finding critic, but as a devotee hoping to find the like beauties in the other religions, and wishing to incorporate in my own the good I may find in them and miss in mine.[19]

A Living Organism

HINDUISM is a living organism liable to growth and decay, and subject to the laws of Nature. One and individable at the root, it has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches. The changes in the seasons affect it. It has its autumn and summer, its winter and spring. The rains nourish and fructify it, too. It is and is not based on scriptures. It does not derive its authority from one book. The *Gita* is universally accepted, but even then it only shows the way. It has hardly any effect on custom. Hinduism is like the Ganges pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in

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the way. Even like the Ganges, it is beneficent in its total effect. It takes a provincial form in every province, but the inner substance is retained everywhere. Custom is not religion. Custom may change, but religion will remain unaltered.

Purity of Hinduism depends on the self-restraint of its votaries. Whenever their religion has been in danger, the Hindus have undergone rigorous penance, searched the causes of the danger and devised means for combating them. The *Shastras* are ever growing. The *Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas* and *Itihasas* did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and, therefore, they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate anew the eternal truths, but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'Slough of Despond.' Because the practice of animal sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time, we used to eat beef, shall we also do so now? Because at one time, we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child-marriages? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as outcastes?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of Truth. Every day we add to our knowledge of the power of *Atman*, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but Truth shall ever be the same. Who has ever known it in its entirety? The *Vedas* represent the Truth, they are infinite. But who has known them in their entirety? What goes today by the name of the *Vedas*

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are not even a millionth part of the real *Veda* – the Book of Knowledge. And who knows the entire meaning of even the few books that we have? Rather than wade through these infinite complications, our sages taught us to learn one thing: 'As with the self, so with the universe.' It is not possible to scan the universe, as it is to scan the self. Know the self and you know the universe. But even knowledge of the self within presupposes ceaseless striving – not only ceaseless but pure, – and pure striving presupposes a pure heart, which, in its turn, depends on the practice of *Yamas* and *Niyamas* – the *cardinal* and *casual* virtues.

This practice is not possible without God's grace, which presupposes Faith and Devotion. This is why Tulsidas sang of the glory of *Ramanama*, that is why the author of the *Bhagavat* taught the *Dwadashamantra* (*Om Namo Bhagwate Vasudevaya*). To my mind, he is a *Sanatani* Hindu who can repeat this *Mantra* from the heart. All else is a bottomless pit, as the sage Akho* has said.

Boycott of beef-eaters may have been proper in the past. It is improper and impossible today. Hinduism does not consist in eating and not-eating. Its kernel consists in right conduct, in correct observance of Truth and Non-violence. Many a man eating meat, but observing the cardinal virtues of Compassion and Truth, and living in the fear of God, is a better Hindu than a hypocrite who abstains from meat. And he whose eyes are opened to the truth of the violence in beef-eating or meat-eating and who has, therefore, rejected them, who loves 'both man and bird and beast', is worthy of our adoration. He has seen and known God; he is His best devotee. He is the teacher of mankind.

* A poet-seer of Gujarat.

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Hinduism and all other religions are being weighed in the balance. Eternal Truth is one. God also is one. Let every one of us steer clear of conflicting creeds and customs and follow the straight path of Truth. Only then shall we be true Hindus. Many styling themselves *Sanatanis* stalk the earth. Who knows how few of them will be chosen by God? God's grace shall descend on those who do His will and wait upon Him, not on those who simply mutter '*Rama, Rama*'.[20]

The Sanatana Dharma

FOR me, the *Sanatana Dharma* is the vital faith handed down from generations, belonging even to the pre-historic period, and based upon the *Vedas* and the writings that followed them. For me, the *Vedas* are as indefinable as God and Hinduism. It would be partially true to say that the *Vedas* are the four books which one finds in print. These books themselves are remnants of the discourses left by unknown seers. Those of later generations added to these original treasures according to their own lights. Then arose a great and lofty-minded man, the composer of the *Gita*. He gave to the Hindu world a synthesis of Hindu religion, at once deeply philosophical and yet easily to be understood by any unsophisticated seeker. It is the one open book to every Hindu who will care to study it, and if all the other scriptures were reduced to ashes, the seven hundred verses of this imperishable book are quite enough to tell one what Hinduism is and how one can live up to it. And I claim to be a *Sanatanist*, because for forty years I have been seeking literally to live up to the teachings of that book. Whatever is contrary to its main theme, I reject as un-Hindu. It excludes no faith and no teacher. It gives me great joy to be able to say that I have studied the *Bible*, the *Quran*, the *Zend Avesta* and the other scriptures of the world with the same reve-

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rence that I have given to the *Gita*. They have broadened my outlook and my Hinduism. Lives of Zoroaster, Jesus and Mohammed, as I have understood them, have illumined many a passage in the *Gita*. I take pride in calling myself a Hindu, because I find the term broad enough not merely to tolerate but to assimilate the teachings of prophets from all the corners of the earth. It compels me by an appeal to my reason and a more penetrating appeal to my heart, in language that has a magnetic touch about it, to believe that all life is one and that it is through God and must return to Him. According to the *Sanatana Dharma* taught by that venerable Mother, life does not consist in outward rites and ceremonial, but in the uttermost inward purification and merging oneself – body, soul and mind – in the Divine Essence.[21]

Why I am a Hindu

AN American friend, who subscribes herself as a lifelong friend of India, writes:

> "As Hinduism is one of the prominent religions of the East, and as you have made a study of Christianity and Hinduism, and on the basis of that study have announced that you are a Hindu, I beg leave to ask of you, if you will do me the favour, to give me your reasons for that choice. Hindus and Christians alike realize that man's chief need is to know God and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Believing that Christ was a revelation of God, Christians of America have sent to India thousands of their sons and daughters to tell the people of India about Christ. Will you, in return, kindly give us your interpretation of Hinduism and make a comparison of Hinduism with the teachings of Christ? I will be deeply grateful for this favour."

I have ventured at several missionary meetings to

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tell English and American missionaries that if they could have refrained from 'telling' India about Christ and had merely lived the life enjoined upon them by the *Sermon on the Mount*, India, instead of suspecting them, would have appreciated their living in the midst of her children and directly profited by their presence. Holding this view, I can 'tell' American friends nothing about Hinduism by way of 'return.' I do not believe in people telling others of their faith, especially with a view to conversion. Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating.

Nor do I consider myself fit to interpret Hinduism except through my own life. And if I may not interpret Hinduism through my written word, I may not compare it with Christianity. The only thing it is possible for me, therefore, to do is to say as briefly as I can, why I am a Hindu.

Believing as I do in the influence of heredity, being born in a Hindu family, I have remained a Hindu. I should reject it, if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth. On examination, I have found it to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me, inasmuch as it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all the other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths. Non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism. (I do not regard Jainism or Buddhism as separate from Hinduism.) Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives. Its worship of the cow is, in my opinion, its unique contribution

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to the evolution of humanitarianism. It is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and, therefore, sacredness, of all life. The great belief in transmigration is a direct consequence of that belief. Finally, the discovery of the law of *Varnashrama* is a magnificent result of the ceaseless search for Truth. The present ideas of cow worship and *Varnashrama* are a caricature of what, in my opinion, the originals are. In this all too brief a sketch, I have mentioned what occur to me to be the outstanding features of Hinduism that keep me in its fold.[21]

My Conception of Varnashrama Dharma

SO far as I know anything at all of Hinduism, the meaning of *Varna* is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as that traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. I regard this as the Law of our Being, if we would accept the definition of man given in all religions. Of all the animal creation of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his Maker. Man's aim in life is not, therefore, to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions, but his predominant calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker; and from this definition it was that the *Rishis* of old discovered this Law of our Being. You will realize that if all of us follow this Law of *Varna*, we would limit our material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and wherethrough we can know God. You will at once, then, see that nine-tenths of the activities that are today going on throughout the world, and which are engrossing our attention, would fall into disuse. You will, then, be entitled to say that *Varna*, as we observe it today, is a travesty of the *Varna*

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that I have described to you. And so it undoubtedly is, but just as we do not hate truth because untruth parades itself as truth, but we sift untruth from truth and cling to the latter, so also we can destroy the distortion that passes as *Varna*, and purify the state to which the Hindu society has been reduced today.

Ashrama is a necessary corollary to what I have stated to you, and if *Varna* today has become distorted, *Ashrama* has altogether disappeared. *Ashrama* means the four stages in one's life.... The *Brahmacharya Ashrama* enjoins that only those who live the life of a *Brahmachari*, at least up to 25 years, are entitled to enter upon the second *Ashrama, i.e.* the *Grihasthashrama*. And because the whole conception of Hinduism is to make man better than he is and draw him nearer to his Maker, the *Rishis* set a limit even to the *Grihasthashrama* stage and imposed on us the obligation of *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyasa*. But today you will vainly search throughout the length and breadth of India for a true *Brahmachari*, for a true *Grihastha*, not to talk of *Vanaprastha* and *Sannayasi*. We may, in our elongated wisdom, laugh at this scheme of life, if we wish to. But I have no doubt whatsoever that this is the secret of the great success of Hinduism. The Hindu civilization has survived the Egyptian, the Assyrian and the Babylonian. The Christian is but two thousand years old. The Islamic is but of yesterday. Great as both these are, they are still, in my humble opinion, in the making. Christian Europe is not at all Christian, but is groping, and so, in my opinion, is Islam still groping for its great secret, and there is today a competition, healthy as also extremely unhealthy and ugly, between these three great religions.

As years go by, the conviction is daily growing upon me that *Varna* is the Law of Man's Being and, therefore,

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as necessary for Christianity and Islam, as it has been necessary for Hinduism and has been its saving. I refuse, therefore, to believe that *Varnashrama* has been the curse of Hinduism, as it is the fashion nowadays in the South on the part of some Hindus to say. But that does not mean that you and I may tolerate for one moment or be gentle towards the hideous travesty of *Varnashrama* that we see about us today. There is nothing in common between *Varnashrama* and caste. Caste, if you will, is undoubtedly a drag upon Hindu progress, and untouchability is, as I have already called it or described it, an excrescence upon *Varnashrama*. It is a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out, as we weed out the weeds that we see growing in wheat fields or rice fields. In this conception of *Varna*, there is absolutely no idea of superiority and inferiority. If I again interpret the Hindu spirit rightly, all life is absolutely equal and one. It is, therefore, an arrogant assumption on the part of the *Brahmin* when he says: 'I am superior to the other three *Varnas*'! That is not what the *Brahmins* of old said. They commanded homage not because they claimed superiority, but because they claimed the right of service through and through without the slightest expectation of a reward. The priests, who today arrogate to themselves the function of the *Brahmin* and distort religion, are no custodians of Hinduism or *Brahamanism*. Consciously or unconsciously they are laying the axe at the root of the very tree on which they are sitting.[22]

The Law of Our Being

VARNASHRAMA DHARMA is one of the foundations on which Hinduism is built. I hold it as a Law of Our Being and whether we know such laws of our being or whether we do not, we have to obey them even as our forefathers obeyed the Law of Gravitation before it was discovered

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by a master mind. Nature's laws are inexorable. We may not disobey them and escape punishment. The conviction is daily forcing itself upon me that this India of ours and the rest of the world are suffering because of our breach of the Law of *Varnashrama Dharma*. If Hinduism today seems to me to be in a fallen state, it is not because of *Varnashrama Dharma*, but because of its wilful disobedience of that *Dharma*. *Varnashrama Dharma* defines man's mission on this earth. He is not born day after day to explore avenues for amassing riches and to explore different means of livelihood; on the contrary, man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his Maker. It restricts him, therefore, for the purpose of holding body and soul together, to the occupation of his forefathers. That and nothing more or nothing less is *Varnashrama Dharma*, and it is not possible nor desirable nor necessary, that I should ignore *Varna Dharma* because the majority of Hindus seem to deny it in their lives. Thus conceived, *Varnashrama Dharma* has nothing in common with castes as we know them today. *Varna Dharma*, therefore, can never mean and has never tolerated untouchability. *Varna Dharma*, therefore, has no of superiority or inferiority. Because many people or millions of people take the names of God in vain and even insult God and man in the name of God Himself, shall we disown our God and find another name for Him.[23]

Contribution of Hinduism to the World

Q. We see you swear by Hinduism. Is it not a legacy of ugly superstitions and practices?

A. I thought I had made it clear already. *Varnashrama Dharma* itself is a unique contribution of Hinduism to the world. Hinduism has saved us from *bhaya, i.e.*, peril. If Hinduism had not come to my rescue, the only

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course for me would have been suicide. I remain a Hindu because Hinduism is a leaven, which makes the world worth living in. From Hinduism was born Buddhism. What we see today is not pure Hinduism, but often a parody of it. Otherwise, it would require no pleading from me in its behalf, but would speak for itself, even as if I was absolutely pure I would not need to speak to you. God does not speak with His tongue, and man, in the measure that he comes near God, becomes like God. Hinduism teaches me that my body is a limitation of the power of the soul within.

Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly, Hinduism has made still more marvellous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul. But we have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not enamoured of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom had prevented India from progressing along those lines so that it might fulfil its special mission of resisting the onrush of materialism After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilizations. Cast a look round you. Where is Rome and where is Greece? Can you find today anywhere the Italy of Gibbon, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy? Go to Greece. Where is the world-famous Attic civilization? Then come to India, let one go through the most ancient records and then look round you and you would be constrained to say: 'Yes, I see here ancient India still living.' True, there are dung-heaps, too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has

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survived is that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.

Among its many contributions, the idea of man's identity with the dumb creation is a unique one. To me cow-worship is a great idea which is capable of expansion. Its freedom from the modern proselytization is also to me a precious thing. It needs no preaching. It says: 'Live the life.' It is my business, it is your business to live the life, and then we will leave its influence on ages. Then, take its contribution in men. Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, not to speak of the more modern names, have left their impress on Hinduism. Hinduism is by no means a spent force or a dead religion.

Then, there is the contribution of the four *Ashramas*, again a unique contribution. There is nothing like it in the whole world. The Catholics have the order of celibates corresponding to *Brahmacharis*, but not as an institution; whereas in India every boy had to go through the first *Ashrama*. What a grand conception it was! Today our eyes are dirty, thoughts dirtier and bodies dirtiest of all, because we are denying Hinduism.

There is yet another thing I have not mentioned. Max Muller said forty years ago that it was dawning on Europe that transmigration is not a theory, but a fact. Well, it is entirely the contribution of Hinduism.

Today, *Varnashrama Dharma* and Hinduism are misrepresented and denied by its votaries. The remedy is not destruction, but correction. Let us reproduce in ourselves the true Hindu spirit, and then ask whether it satisfies the soul or not.[24]

Caste and Varna

CASTE has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know

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that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. *Varna* and *Ashrama* are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The Law of *Varna* teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights, but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful, and absolutely equal in status. The callings of a *Brahmin*—spiritual teacher—and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to their livelihood and no more. Indeed, one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law. Living in Segaon with its population of 600, I do not find a great disparity between the earnings of different tradesmen, including *Brahmins*. I find, too, that real *Brahmins* are to be found even in these degenerate days who are living on alms freely given to them and are giving freely of what they have of spiritual treasures. It would be wrong and improper to judge the Law of *Varna* by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a *Varna* whilst they openly commit a breach of its only operative rule. Arrogation of a superior status by any of the *Varnas* over another is a denial of the Law. And there is nothing in the Law of Varna to warrant a belief in untouchability. (The essence of Hinduism is contained in its enunciation of one and only God as Truth and its bold acceptance of *Ahimsa* as the Law of the Human Family).

I am aware that my interpretation of Hinduism will be disputed by many.... That does not affect my position. It is an interpretation by which I have lived for nearly

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half a century and according to which I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to regulate my life.[25]

The Law of Life

Q. In your Hinduism, do you basically include the caste system?

A. I do not. Hinduism does not believe in caste. I would obliterate it at once. But I believe in *Varnadharma* which is the Law of Life. I believe that some people are born to teach and some to defend, and some to engage in trade and agriculture and some do manual labour, so much so that these occupations become hereditary. The Law of *Varna* is nothing but the Law of Conservation of Energy. Why should my son not be a scavenger if I am one?

Q. Indeed, do you go so far?

A. I do, because I hold a scavenger's profession in no way inferior to a clergyman's.

Q. I grant that, but should Lincoln have been a wood-chopper rather than President of the U.S.A.?

A. But why should not a wood-chopper be a President of the United States? Gladstone used to chop wood.

Q. But he did not accept it as his calling.

A. He would not have been worse off, if he had done so. What I mean is, one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For, a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That, according to me, is Hinduism. There is no better Communism on earth, and I have illustrated it with one verse from the *Upanishads* which means: God pervades all—animate and inanimate. Therefore, renounce all and dedicate it to God and then live. The right of living is thus derived from renunciation. It does not say: 'When all do their part of the work, I too will do it.' It says: 'Don't bother about others, do your job first and leave the rest to HIM.' *Varnadharma*

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acts even as the Law of Gravitation. I cannot cancel it or its working by trying to jump higher and higher day by day till gravitation ceases to work. That effort will be vain. So is the effort to jump over one another. The Law of *Varna* is the antithesis of competition which kills.[26]

Q. You have said caste should go. But then will Hinduism survive? Why do you thus mix up Hinduism with the progressive religions like Christianity or Islam?

A. I maintain that caste, as it is understood, must go if Hinduism is to survive. I do not believe that Christianity and Islam are progressive and Hinduism static *i.e.*, retrogressive. As a matter of fact, I notice no definite progress in any religion. The world would not be the shambles it has become if the religions of the world were progressive. There is room for *Varna*, as a duty. This is true of all religions whether the name used is other than *Varna*. What is a Muslim *Maulvi* or a Christian priest but a *Brahmin* if he teaches his flock its true duty, not for money but because he possesses the gift of interpretation? And this is true of the other divisions.[27]

Hinduism and Untouchability

I HAVE always claimed to be a *Sanatani* Hindu. It is not that I am quite innocent of the scriptures. I am not a profound scholar of Sanskrit. I have read the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* only in translation. Naturally, therefore, mine is not a scholarly study of them. My knowledge of them is in no way profound, but I have studied them as I should do as a Hindu and I claim to have grasped their true spirit. By the time I had reached the age of 21, I had studied other religions also.

There was a time when I was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity. When I recovered my balance of mind, I felt that to me salvation was possible only

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through the Hindu religion and my faith in Hinduism grew deeper and more enlightened.

But even then I believed that untouchability was no part of Hinduism; and that, if it was, such Hinduism was not for me.

True, Hinduism does not regard untouchability as a sin. I do not want to enter into any controversy regarding the interpretation of the *Shastras*. It might be difficult for me to establish my point by quoting authorities from the *Bhagvat* or the *Manusmriti*. But I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability. It has degraded us, made us the *pariahs* of the Empire. Even the Mussalmans caught the sinful contagion from us, and in South Africa, in East Africa and in Canada, the Mussalmans no less than the Hindus came to be regarded as *pariahs*. All this evil has resulted from the sin of untouchability.[28]

Contrary to Spirit of Hinduism

UNTOUCHABILITY is not a sanction of religion, it is a device of Satan. The devil has always quoted scriptures. But scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth. I am not going to burn a spotless horse because the *Vedas* are reported to have advised, tolerated, or sanctioned the sacrifice. For me, the *Vedas* are divine and unwritten. 'The letter killeth.' It is the spirit that giveth the light. And the spirit of the *Vedas* is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon.[29]

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The Idea of Superiority and Inferiority

FOR me, untouchability and the idea of high and low have no room in Hinduism. There are the *Varnas*, but none of the *Varnas* is superior to the other. *Varna* does not connote superiority; it connotes different functions and different duties.

Whoever has more of the earthly or spiritual goods has to perform more service to the community, has to be more humble. The moment untouchability and the sense of high and low crept in, Hinduism began to decline.[30]

Untouchability is a corroding poison that is eating into the vitals of Hindu Society. *Varnashrama* is not a religion of superiority and inferiority. No man of God can consider another man as inferior to himself. He must consider every man as his blood-brother. It is the cardinal principle of every religion.[31]

The idea of superiority and inferiority is repugnant to the most elementary principles of morality. A *Brahmin* who considers himself superior to any single creature of God ceases to be a knower of *Brahma*. If we are children of the same God, how can there be any rank among us? The very first mention of *Varna* in the *Vedas* likens the four *Varnas* to the four main parts of the body. Is the head superior to the other three? What will happen to the body, if these members began a quarrel about rank? The Law of *Varna* is one of absolute equality among all the creatures of God. It is the basis of all the religions of the world.[32]

In the eye of God, there are no touchables and untouchables. *Brahmins* are called *Brahmins* not for their superiority, not for their ability to lord it over, but because of their ability to serve mankind by their knowledge and by their ability to efface themselves in the act of serving. Theirs is the privilege and theirs the duty of serving their

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fellowmen; and they cannot do so to the full, unless they renounce every earthly reward.[33]

I often feel that unless we take due precautions and remove this curse from our midst, Hinduism itself is in danger of destruction. That in this age of reason, in this age of wide travel, in this age of a comparative study of religions, there should be found people, some of whom are educated, to uphold the hideous doctrine of treating a single human being as an untouchable, or unapproachable, or unseeable because of his birth, passes my comprehension. As a lay humble student of Hinduism and claiming to be one desirous of practising Hinduism in the spirit and to the letter, let me tell you that I have found no warrant or support for this terrible doctrine. Let us not deceive ourselves into the belief that everything that is written in Sanskrit and printed is *Shastra* and has any binding effect upon us. That which is opposed to the fundamental maxims of morality, that which is opposed to trained reason, cannot be claimed as *Shastra* no matter how ancient it may be. There is enough warrant for the proposition that I have just stated in the *Vedas,* in the *Mahabharata* and in the *Bhagavad Gita.*[34]

Every incantation, whether it is in Sanskrit or whether it is in Tamil, is not necessarily *Shastra. My definition of true Shastra is the chosen word that giveth us life.* Therefore any text, however ancient it may be described to be, which takes us along the path of perdition, which is, therefore, inconsistent with Truth or the Universal Law of Life, is not *Shastra.* And hence have we been taught that *Shastras* come really out of the mouth of people of character whom we describe as holy men, and not every man, who wears red-coloured robe and smears his forehead and the whole of his body with all kinds of marks and rolls out verses after verses from things which he calls scrip-

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tures, is a holy man. *A holy man is one who never considers himself superior to any single creature on earth and who has renounced all the pleasures of life.* But really in this *Kaliyuga*, we do not easily come across a holy man.[35]

The Authority of Religious Books

THE stories told in the *Puranas* are some of them most dangerous, if we do not know their bearing on the present conditions. The *Shastras* would be death-traps if we were to regulate our conduct according to every detail given in them, or according to that of the characters therein described. They help us only to define and argue out fundamental principles. If some well-known character in religious books sinned against God or man, is that a warrant for our repeating the sin? It is enough for us to be told, once for all, that Truth is the only thing that matters in the world, that Truth is God. It is irrelevant to be told that even Yudhishthira was betrayed into an untruth. It is more relevant for us to know that when he spoke an untruth, he had to suffer for it that very moment and that his great name in no way protected him from punishment. Similarly, it is irrelevant for us to be told that Adishankara avoided a *chandala*. It is enough for us to know that a religion that teaches us to treat all that lives as we treat ourselves, cannot possibly countenance the inhuman treatment of a single creature, let alone a whole class of perfectly innocent human beings. Moreover, we have not even all the facts before us to judge what Adishankara did or did not do. Still less, do we know the meaning of the word *chandala* where it occurs. It has admittedly many meanings, one of which is a sinner. But if all sinners are to be regarded as untouchables, it is very much to be feared that we should all be under the ban of untouchability. That untouchability is an old institution, nobody

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has ever denied. But, if it is an evil, it cannot be defended on the ground of its antiquity.[36]

Hinduism is not a codified religion. We have in Hinduism hundreds and thousands of books whose names even we do not know, which go under the short name of *Shastras*. Now, when we want to find out whether a thing is good or bad, I do not go to a particular book, but I look to the sum total of the effect of Hinduism. In Hinduism, we have got an admirable foot-rule to measure every *Shastra* and every rule of conduct, and that is Truth. Whatever falls from Truth should be rejected, no matter where it comes from; therefore, the burden lies on the shoulders of that person who upholds a practice which is inconsistent with Truth; so that if a man wants to defend, for instance, untouchability, he has to show that it is consistent with Truth. Unless he shows that, all the authorities that he may cite in support of it are to me irrelevant.[37]

An Ineffaceable Blot

THERE is an ineffaceable blot that Hinduism today carries with it. I have declined to believe that it has been handed to us from immemorial times. I think that this miserable, wretched, enslaving spirit of untouchableness must have come to us when we were, in the cycle of our lives, at our lowest ebb, and that evil has still stuck to us and it still remains with us. It is, to my mind, a curse that has come to us, and as long as that curse remains with us, so long I think we are bound to consider that every affliction that we labour under in this sacred land is a fit and proper punishment for this great and indelible crime that we are committing. That any person should be considered untouchable because of his calling passes one's comprehension.[38]

" I think, in the long run, in the race for life in which

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all the religions of the world are today engaged, either Hinduism has got to perish or untouchability has to be rooted out completely, so that the fundamental principle of *advaita* Hinduism may be realized in practical life.[39]

Brahminism

I BELIEVE *Brahminism* to be unadulterated wisdom leading one to the realization of *Brahma,* that is God. If I did not hold that view, I should no longer call myself a Hindu. *Brahmins,* however, like all the other members of the human family, are not all true representatives of *Brahminism:* But I have to believe that, of all the classes in the world, the *Brahmin* will show the largest percentage of those who have given up their all in search of knowledge, that is Truth. I know of no system other than Hinduism under which class has been set apart from generation to generation for the exclusive pursuit of Divine Knowledge and consigned to voluntary poverty. That *Brahmins* could not keep up the high standard that they had imposed upon themselves is no special fault of theirs. Their imperfection merely proves that they were as fallible as the rest of mankind, and so corruption crept into the so-called Sacred Books, and we have the spectacle of the most selfless rules governing *Brahmins* side by side with the selfish rules also made by them in order to help their breed. But it was the *Brahmins* who rose against the corruptions and selfish interpolations into the sacred texts. It was they who, time and again, strove to purge themselves and society of evil.... But I admit that *Brahmins* as a class have suffered degradation. If they had not, if they had lived up to their profession, Hinduism would not be in the degraded state in which it is. It would be a contradiction in terms to suggest that Hinduism is what it is, in spite of the correct life of the *Brahmins.* That could not be, because the *Brahmins*

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themselves have taught us to believe that they are the true custodians of the Divine Wisdom and that, where there is Divine Wisdom, there is no fear, there is no grinding pauperism, there is no high and low state, there is no greed, jealousy, war, plunder and the like. Because *Brahminism* went down, it drew down with it all the other classes of Hindus, and I have not a shadow of doubt in my mind that, if *Brahminism* does not revive, Hinduism must perish; and for me the infallible test of the revival of *Brahminism*, that is Hinduism, is the root and branch removal of untouchability. The more I study the Hindu Scriptures and the more I discuss them with all kinds of *Brahmins*, the more I feel convinced that untouchability is the greatest blot upon Hinduism.

This conviction is amply supported by many learned *Brahmins* who have no axes to grind, who are devoted to the pursuit of Truth and who receive nothing, not even thanks for their opinion. But today *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* are mere labels. There is utter confusion of *Varna*, as I understand it, ... and I wish that all the Hindus will voluntarily call themselves *Shudras*. That is the only way to demonstrate the truth of *Brahminism* and to revive *Varnadharma* in its true state. Because all Hindus may be classed as *Shudras*, wisdom and power and wealth will not disappear, but they will be all used for the service of not a sectional religion, but the service of Truth and Humanity. Anyway, in battling against untouchability and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland:

"Victory lies not in realization of the goal,
but in a relentless pursuit after it."[40]

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True Varnadharma

THERE is no real *Varna* today. When we have come to our own, when we have cleansed ourselves, we may have the four *Varnas* according to the way in which we can express the best in us. But *Varna* then will invest no one with a superior status or right, it will invest one with higher responsibility and duties. Those who will impart knowledge in a spirit of service will be called *Brahmins*. They will assume no superior airs but will be true servants of society. When inequality of status or rights is ended, every one of us will be equal. I do not know, however, when we shall be able to revive true *Varnadharma*. Its real revival would mean true democracy.[41]

Both Hinduism and the Hindus are on their trial today. I have said in all humility that, if they fail in the trial, they are bound to perish. For, God cannot have created one man high and another low. I have seen nowhere in the world untouchability observed in the name of religion and based on birth such as we are observing today. Neither the intellect nor the heart can reconcile itself to it. So far as a layman like myself can see, it has no sanction in the *Shastras*, and I have been supported in my belief by a host of *Pandits* who have made a deep study of them.[42]

A Life and Death Struggle

I, WHO believe in the equality of the great religions of the world and from my early days have learnt to honour other religions as my own, have no difficulty in inviting and taking the co-operation of the followers of other religions in this movement. It is part of my nature. This is essentially a matter of repentance on the part of the so-called higher classes. They have to do reparation for the wrongs they have hitherto done to a portion of themselves, on whose backs they have hither-

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to ridden. It is an effort on the part of Hindu reformers to blot out this shame from the face of Hinduism. I have not hesitated to say that either untouchability lives and Hinduism perishes, or untouchability does and Hinduism rises purified. It is a life and death struggle between the darkness of superstition and the light of reform. If this reform in Hinduism comes about, I have not the shadow of a doubt that it will be service not only of all the communities of India, but of the whole of humanity.[43]

Plea for Purification

RELIGIONS like nations are being weighed in the balance. God's grace and revelation are the monopoly of no race or nation. They descend equally upon all who wait upon God. That religion and that nation will be blotted out of the face of the earth which pins its faith to injustice, untruth or violence. God is Light, not darkness. God is Love, not hate. God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is Great. We, His creatures are but dust. Let us be humble and recognize the place of the lowliest of His creatures. Krishna honoured Sudama in his rags as he honoured no one else. Love is the root of religion or sacrifice, and this perishable body is the root of self or irreligion, says Tulsidas... The Hindus have to purify themselves before they can hope to revive the *Vedic* philosophy and make it a living reality.[44]

No High and No Low

IT can never be an act of merit to look down upon any human being as inferior to us. We are all worshippers of one God, whom we worship under different names. We must, therefore, realize our essential unity and give up untouchability as well as the spirit of superiority and inferiority between human beings.[45]

The spirit of democracy, that now pervades the

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world, demands that one should not be considered superior to another. All are sons and daughters of one Divine Essence.

In the Kingdom of Great God, there cannot be any superiority and inferiority. Let us make this world, therefore, the Kingdom of God instead of making it the kingdom of devil as sometimes it appears to become. Let our lives be absolutely pure, our eyes straight, our hands unpolluted.[46]

Forget altogether that some are high and some are low. Forget altogether that some are touchables and some are untouchables. God cannot be so cruel and unjust as to make distinctions of high and low between man and man, and woman and woman. This untouchability is the greatest blot on Hinduism, and I have not hesitated to say that, if untouchability lives, Hinduism dies. If one may use man's language about God, God has been very patient with us. But I have no hesitation in saying that even God's patience can be exhausted, and He will no longer be patient towards this atrocity that man has been doing to man in Hindu India.

It is impossible that God, who is the God of Justice, could have made the distinctions that men observe today in the name of religion.[47]

A religion cannot be sustained by the number of its lip followers denying in their lives its tenets. This great Hindu religion itself will perish in spite of its so-called millions of followers, if its votaries persist in harbouring evil of untouchability. Not because untouchables can be counted by the millions. It would perish even if they were a handful. Milk is poisoned and has to be thrown away whether you put a little or much arsenic in it. If we believe that we are all children of one and the same God and that God is Truth and Justice, how can there be

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untouchability amongst us, His children? God of Truth and Justice can never create distinctions of high and low among His own children.[48]

I do believe in harmony between all religions. I have myself worked at it in my humble way. Caste distinctions, in so far as they imply superiority of one over another, have to be abolished altogether. That is merely a phase or a grade of untouchability. But in so far as caste in the sense of *Varna* fulfils Nature's Law of Conservation of Human Energy and true economics, it is good to recognize and obey the Law. You may deny the existence of any such law. I can then only refer you to the few proofs I have given in support of it.... I need say no more about caste beyond this—that, in so far as abolition of distinctions of high and low are concerned, there is but one caste. We are all children of one and the same God and, therefore, absolutely equal.[49]

There can be in God's eyes no distinction between man and man, even as there is no distinction between animal and animal. Had God designed one part of humanity to be lower than others, He would have put some distinguishing mark upon some parts of our bodies whereby these distinctions could have been unmistakably seen, felt and demonstrated. Go where you will, from one end of India to the other, you will fail, as I have failed, to notice any such distinguishing feature in connection with those who call themselves high caste-Hindus and those whom the so-called high caste-Hindus describe as 'untouchables', 'invisibles' and what not. I, therefore, ask you seriously to consider this urgent question. I have said, and I repeat... what I have said and from a thousand platforms, that, if we do not remove untouchability, root and branch, from our hearts, we are a doomed race, and

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Hinduism like many other 'isms' will perish and the discredit will be ours.[50]

When you take religion, you take all. Religion must govern all life. It is my implicit faith that, if Hinduism rids itself of the distinctions of high and low, the Hindus will be in a position to mix with Mussalmans, Christians and others on terms of absolute equality. Today, there is a bar between them. I would like to lift that bar. We may have our private religious opinions, but why should they be a bar to the meeting of hearts?

I would love to absorb also Christians and Mussalmans, not by converting them to Hinduism but by disarming their suspicion. If the Hindus keep their behaviour honourable, the suspicions of the others will be disarmed. Why should Hindus have any difficulty in mixing with Mussalmans and Christians? Untouchability creates a bar not merely between Hindus and Hindus, but between man and man. When that is gone, we shall all be one in God. My Hinduism is as extensive as Truth.[51]

Cause for All Humanity

THE more I think, the more do I feel that this is cause for all humanity and for all time. And if we, Hindus, succeed in exorcising this devil of untouchability, if we succeed in purifying Hinduism of this blot, this uncleanliness, I have no doubt whatsoever that we, all communities of India belonging to different religions, will live in happiness, contentment, peace and real unity. If we got full success in this war against untouchability, I have no doubt whatsoever that we shall achieve the heart unity we are pining for. Suspicion will melt away before mutual love, respect and trust. I pray to God Almighty that He may bless us with sufficient strength and wisdom to see this error and correct it, whatever it may cost. Let us remember that for long centuries we have suppressed a portion

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of ourselves, and in so doing we have degraded and suppressed ourselves. Nobody in the world has succeeded in suppressing others without degrading and suppressing himself. The more I see, the more I feel that, if we do not drive out untouchability, Hinduism will perish; and it will be a loss not only to us but to the world. Remember that it is the religion which owes its inspiration to the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. And for what reason will it perish? That we did not deserve the message of the *Upanishads*, the grand principle enunciated in the *Vedas* that God alone is and nothing else is. Do you suppose that there can be divisions of high and low in us, who have been preachers of the doctrine that God is the God of Justice? The more I think, the more do I feel convinced that untouchability can never be part of any religion in the world. Today, all religions are in the melting pot. They are being critically examined and tested. Public opinion will reject Hinduism, if we do not drive away this evil from our midst.[52]

All Men and Women are Equal

NATURE has appointed all men and women to be equal. But man in his arrogance has come to the conclusion that there are some who are high and some who are low. That doctrine of inherent inequality can never be divinely inspired. Look in Nature wherever you will, you will nowhere find a parallel to this man-made doctrine. I hope you, one and all, men and women, will eradicate the evil of untouchability from your hearts; and I ask you to join with me in a heart prayer to God Almighty that He may bless us with strength and courage to root out this evil entirely.[53]

I have not the shadow of a doubt that untouchability is an unmitigated curse in Hinduism. If *Shastras* represent the will and wish of God, there can be no warrant what-

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soever in them for untouchability, for which you find no parallel in any part of the world save India. It is bad enough when dictated by selfish motives to consider ourselves high and other people low. But it is not only worse but a double wrong when we tack religion to an evil like untouchability. It, therefore, grieves me when learned *Pandits* come forward and invoke the authority of *Shastras* for a patent evil like untouchability. I have said, and I repeat today, that we, Hindus, are undergoing a period of probation. Whether we desire it or not, untouchability is going. But if during this period of probation we repent for the sin, if we reform and purify ourselves, history will record that one act as a supreme act of purification on the part of the Hindus. But if, through the working of the time spirit, we are compelled to do things against our will and Harijans come to their own, it will be no credit to the Hindus or to Hinduism. But I go a step further and say that if we fail in this trial, Hinduism and Hindus will perish.[54]

It is wrong, it is sinful, to consider some people lower than ourselves. On God's earth nobody is low and nobody is high. We are all His creatures; and just as in the eyes of parents all their children are absolutely equal, so also in God's eyes all His creatures must be equal. Therefore, I ask you to believe me when I tell you that there is no sanction in religion for untouchability. I would, therefore, ask you to give a place in your hearts to all Harijans around you. Welcome Harijan children in your own homes. Go to Harijan quarters and look after their children and their homes; speak to Harijan women as to your own sisters.[55]

There is no such thing as this untouchability, unapproachability and invisibility in religion. It is a device of the devil. But God is above the devil and above all of us.

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I have not the shadow of a doubt that He will foil all the wicked devices of man. Thus, untouchability is transitory. I have said that either untouchability passes or Hinduism will pass from the face of the earth.[56]

In my opinion, it is one of the greatest sins that we, Hindus, have been committing against man and God. To degrade human beings, as we have been doing in this part of the world, and then to say that they are what they are because of their past deeds is a complete caricature of the Law of *Karma*. I claim to know somewhat, from first-hand evidence, of the working of the Law of *Karma*, because practically a period of fifty years I have devoted to find out what that Law of *Karma* could be. And this much I do know that to apply it to everybody else but ourselves is to distort it altogether.[57]

My Message

MY message is exceedingly simple. It is no new truth that has dawned upon me today. I have to the best of my ability striven to live up to it for the past fifty years. And the more I have succeeded in living up to it, the greater has been my inward joy. Nor is it for the first time that I am delivering this message to India.

My message is simply this that *savarna* Hindus, who have been considering themselves superior to those whom they have called untouchables, unapproachables, invisibles, or *avarna* Hindus, should realize that this arrogation of superiority has no sanction whatsoever in the *Shastras*. If I discovered that those scriptures, which are known as *Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Smritis,* etc., clearly showed that they claimed divine authority for untouchability as I have described it to you, then nothing on this earth would hold me to Hinduism. I should throw it overboard, as I should throw overboard a rotten apple. My reason is offended and my heart is wounded at the

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very thought that God Himself, who has created both *savarna* Hindus and *avarna* Hindus, should impose this bar sinister between His children. The very thought that the *Rishis* who gave the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* and who in every *mantra* that they pronounced taught the unity of God, could ever conceive of any such thing as untouchability, as it is practised today in Hinduism, must be repugnant to every intelligent person. But prejudice and superstitions die hard. They cloud the reason, befog the intellect and harden the heart. And so you find learned men defending this untouchability.

But you should know that behind this message there lurks also a much greater message. This monster of untouchability has invaded every form of society in India; and the idea behind this message is that there should be not only no untouchability as between Hindus and Hindus, but that there should be no untouchability whatsoever between Hindus, Christians, Mussalmans, Parsis and the rest. I am convinced that, if this great change of heart can be brought about among millions of *savarna* Hindus and if their hearts can be purified – as certainly they will be purified – we should live in India as one people, trusting each other and without any mutual distrust or suspicion. It is untouchability with all its subtle forms that separates us from one another, and makes life itself unlovely and difficult to live.[58]

The Ulcer

THE ulcer of untouchability has gone so deep down that it seems to pervade our life. Hence the unreal differences: *Brahmin* and non-*Brahmin*, province and province, religion and religion. Why should there be all this poison smelling of untouchability? Why should we not all be children of one Indian family and, further, of one

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human family? Are we not like branches of the same tree?[59]

I want to exorcise the devil of untouchability which has today distorted and disfigured Hinduism out of all recognition. I know that, if this evil can be removed root and branch, those very friends who say religion is the greatest obstacle to the progress of India will immediately change their minds. But if it is any consolation to these friends, I tell them that, if I came to the conclusion that Hinduism sanctioned untouchability, I should denounce it. But even then I would not go so far with them as to say that religion itself is useless and that God is not God but devil. For me, the result will be that I shall lose faith in Hindus and Hinduism, but my faith in God will be strengthened. And I want to tell you why it will be strengthened. Faith is not a delicate flower which would wither under the slightest stormy weather. Faith is like the Himalaya mountains which cannot possibly change. No storm can possibly remove the Himalaya mountains from their foundations. I am daily praying for strength from God to be able to say to God, when Hindus disappoint me: 'Although Thy own creation has disappointed me, I still cling to Thee as a babe clings to the mother's breast'. And I want every one of you to cultivate that faith in God and religion.

It is my conviction that all the great faiths of the world are true, are God-ordained and that they serve the purpose of God and of those who have been brought up in those surroundings and those faiths. I do not believe that the time will ever come when we shall be able to say there is only one religion in the world. In a sense, even today there is one fundamental religion in the world. But there is no such thing as a straight line in Nature.

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Religion is one tree with many branches. As branches you may say religions are many; as tree, Religion is one.[60]

One in Many

GOD has made Nature so that we are one in many. There are different faiths in this world. I believe them all to be true. But so long as there are different faiths and we belong to one faith, there are special obligations attached to that faith. That does not mean that I would not work for Mussalman fellowmen or Christian fellowmen or Parsis or Jews or any other. But I can realize unity with no one, if I loose my foot from the platform on which I am standing. I believe in God much more than I believe in the fact that you and I are alive and that I am speaking to you. I may give you an illustration of what I mean. In appearance, I am speaking to you and you are listening to me. In reality, your hearts and minds may be somewhere else. My heart also may be somewhere else and my mind may be in something else. Then, my speaking or your listening would be a deception. Therefore, my speaking and your listening, though they are an appearance, may not be a reality. But my heart, word and deed are pledged to the Being called God, *Allah*, Rama or Krishna. You will now easily recognize that it is true when I say that my belief in God is far more a reality to me than this meeting which I am addressing.[61]

Towards Brotherhood of Man

THE anti-untouchability movement is a big step towards universal brotherhood. Untouchability, believed in as a part of religion by millions of the human family, is, perhaps, the greatest stumbling block in the way of the realization of the Brotherhood of Man. If, therefore, *savarna* Hindus voluntarily and sincerely give up untouchability, humanity would be much nearer the realiza-

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tion of this goal than at any other time in history. The movement has no political aim. It is purely one of self-purification. Hindus are one branch of the great human family. If that branch continues to suffer from the disease of untouchability, it would be better that it should wither and be cut off. If, however, it flourished through the removal of untouchability, it could not but promote the health of the whole family. Hence it is that I call it essentially a religious movement and invite the willing co-operation of the entire world for its success.[62]

The whole of my life is saturated with the religious spirit. I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me, because they say that even my politics are derived from my religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine, are derived from my religion. I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath. If you recognize that truth, naturally God regulates every activity of yours. But, then, it is as a man of religion who is trying to live up to it every moment that I am here to tell you that untouchability is not of divine origin. I am here to tell you, after having searched the *Shastras* in the manner in which a layman like myself can do, that untouchability is a sin against God and man. I am here to tell you that there is no warrant in the *Shastras* for untouchability as we practise it today.[63]

And remember, too, the magnificient result that we intend, or we expect, to achieve from this removal of untouchability – it is no less than the realization of the Brotherhood of Man. You cannot, – millions of caste-Hindus cannot – do reparation to several million Harijans, whom they have suppressed for centuries, without setting

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free a power, a force, that will envelop the whole of the human family and knit all its members together into one. And it is because I have never lost sight of this goal that I have called this movement a deeply spiritual and exclusively religious movement. And it is because I realize to the fullest extent how untouchability, as we practise it today in the name of religion, is a stumbling block in the realization of this Brotherhood, that I have not hesitated to say that, if we do not cleanse ourselves of this cursed untouchability, Hinduism and Hindus are bound to perish.[64]

A Tragedy

IT is a tragedy that religion for us means today nothing more than restrictions on food and drink, nothing more than adherence to a sense of superiority and inferiority. Let me tell you that there cannot be grosser ignorance than this. Birth and observance of forms cannot determine one's superiority or inferiority. Character is the only determining factor. God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority, and no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or untouchable because of his or her birth can command our allegiance; it is a denial of God and Truth which is God. God, who is the embodiment of Truth and Right and Justice, can never have sanctioned a religion or practice which regards a fifth of our vast population as untouchables. I want you, therefore, to rid yourselves of this monstrous notion. Untouchability attaching to unclean work is there, must be there. It applies to every one of us, but the moment we have washed ourselves clean of dirt or filth, we cease to be untouchables. But no work or conduct can render a man or woman untouchable for all time. Sinners we are all to a greater or less extent, and everyone of our spiritual books — *Gita*, *Bhagavat*, and *Tulsi Ramayana* —

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declares in no uncertain terms that whoever seeks refuge in Him, whoever takes His name, shall be free from sin. That covenant is for all mankind.[65]

I cannot understand how a *Dharma* that boasts of having produced a Tulsidas can sanction a practice which condemns an entire section of humanity to a life of abasement and inferiority. "Kindness is the foundation of all religions, pride is the parent of all sins"—has sung Tulsidas. He has further said that no one can see God, unless he develops a universal outlook first and sheds all narrowness and parochialism. I commend this text to you all to remember and reflect upon.[66]

We Are Debtors

REMEMBER that we are debtors and Harijans are creditors. We have until today delighted in mounting on their backs, like 'the old man of the sea.' We have exacted labour from them and have not scrupled to belabour them, and even to kill them, when they raised a voice of protest.... The poor folks would seem to have been born in order to toil and moil for us! We have been guilty of a heinous sin, and it is time we expatiated it. Unless we discharge our debt, Hinduism will perish. Untouchability must be destroyed, or else it will destroy Hinduism. That is why I am giving myself no rest. Not that I do not need it. I may say that I have several years of arrears of rest to cover, but how can I have rest? How can one have rest with a raging fire within? How can any Hindu, knowing that Hinduism is on the brink of an active volcano, afford to have a moment's rest? Not, surely, until the volcano is extinguished. The service of the Harijans is the service of Hinduism, and the service of Hinduism is the service of Humanity. Hinduism is no exclusive religion, it tolerates no intolerance. Intolerance it holds to be a sin. But unless and until we befriend

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the Harijan, unless and until we treat him as our own brother, we cannot treat Humanity as one brotherhood. The whole movement for the removal of untouchability is a movement for the establishment of Universal Brotherhood, and nothing else.[67]

Essence of Hinduism

LET me for a few moments consider what Hinduism consists of, what it is that has fired so many saints about whom we have historical record. Why has it contributed so many philosophers to the world? What is it in Hinduism that has so enthused its devotees for centuries? Did they see untouchability in Hinduism and still enthuse over it? In the midst of my struggle against untouchability, I have been asked as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalma* that we find in Islam, nor have we 3-16 John of the *Bible*. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the most matter-of-fact among them? Some have said, and not without good reason, the *Gayatri* answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the *Gayatri Mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then, as you are aware, I have, for years past, been swearing by the *Bhagavad Gita*, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my *Kamadhenu*, my guide, my open sesame, on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me. But it requires a prayerful study before the *Kamadhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

But I have fixed upon one *Mantra* as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the *Ishopanishad*. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail.

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I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the *Upanishads* and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the *Ishopanishad* were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

Now this *Mantra* * divides itself in four parts. The first part is ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंचं जगत्यां जगत्।' It means, as I would translate, all this that we see in this great Universe is pervaded by God. Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा I divide these into two and translate them thus: 'Renounce it and enjoy it.' There is another rendering which means the same thing, though. 'Enjoy what He gives you.' Even so, you can divide it into two parts. Then, follows the final and most important part, मागृधः, कस्यसिद्धनम् which means: 'Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession.' All the other *Mantras* of that ancient *Upanishad* are commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *Mantra*. As I read the *Mantra* in the light of the *Gita* or the *Gita* in the light of the *Mantra*, I find that the *Gita* is a commentary on this *Mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the Socialist and the Communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true — and I hold it to be true — you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *Mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades

* "God the Ruler pervades all there is in this Universe. Therefore, renounce and dedicate all to Him and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody's possessions."

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the Universe? The three other parts of the *Mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation, but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is, therefore, a regeneration. And, then, since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough, the *Mantra* closes with this magnificent thought: 'Do not covet anybody's possession.' The moment you carry out these precepts, you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter. No doubt, it will not satisfy the aspiration of him who does not believe in God and His undisputed sovereignty.

Remember that one verse of the *Ishopanishad* and forget all about the other scriptures. You can, of course, drown yourselves and be suffocated in the ocean of scriptures. They are good for the learned if they will be humble and wise, but for the ordinary man in the street nothing but that *Mantra* is necessary to carry him across the ocean.... Peace on earth and goodwill among mankind needs nothing more nor less than an acceptance of the truth underlying the *Mantra*, which is no abstruse formula, no exclusive credal doctrine, but a universal law.[68]

And, without fear of contradiction, I am here to say.

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that every believer in this verse is wholly a Hindu; and if he acts up to what is taught by this *Mantra*, he will find his freedom here and hereafter. I know no other road or better road to happiness than is contained in this first *Mantra* of *Ishopanishad*.[69]

All-Comprehensive Mantra

I HAVE endeavoured to study the *Bible* with the eyes of a devout Christian and the *Quran* with the eyes of a devout Mussalman, and I have not hesitated to assimilate whatever I have found to be good in both these scriptures. I have studied other scriptures of the world also, but I have singled these out for the sake of illustration. But, you might well ask, if I declare all these religions to be equally true and equally demanding my respect, what is the meaning of my remaining a Hindu? I shall tell you why. Latterly, I have been endeavouring to describe what I regard as the essence of Hinduism, and I have been suggesting to them one incredibly simple *Mantra* of the *Ishopanishad*, and, as you know, it is one of the *Upanishads* that enjoys the sanctity of the *Vedas*. The very first verse of the *Ishopanishad* means simply this: God pervades everything that is to be found in this Universe down to the tiniest atom. The *Mantra* describes God as the Creator, the Ruler, and the Lord. The seer to whom this *Mantra* or verse was revealed was not satisfied with the magnificent statement that God was to be found everywhere. So, he went further and said: 'Since God pervades everything, nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. God is the undisputed, unchallengeable Master of everything you possess.' And so when a person who calls himself a Hindu goes through the process of regeneration or a second birth, as Christians would call it, he has to perform a dedication or renunciation of all that he has in ignorance called his own property. And, then, when he

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has performed this act of dedication or renunciation, he is told that he will win a reward in the shape of God taking good care of what he will require for food, clothing or housing. Therefore, the condition of enjoyment or use of the necessaries of life is their dedication or renunciation. And that dedication or renunciation has got to be done from day to day, lest we may in this busy world forget the central fact of life. And, to crown all, the seer says: 'Covet not anybody's riches.' I suggest to you that the truth that is embedded in this very short *Mantra* is calculated to satisfy the highest cravings of every human being —whether they have reference to this world or to the next. I have in my search of the scriptures of the world found nothing to add to this *Mantra*. Looking back upon all the little I have read of the scriptures—it is precious little I confess—I feel that everything good in all the scriptures is derived from this *Mantra*. If it is Universal Brotherhood—not only brotherhood of all human beings, but of all living beings—I find it in this *Mantra*. If it is unshakable faith in the Lord and Master—and all the adjectives you can think of—I find it in this *Mantra*. If it is the idea of complete surrender to God and of the faith that He will supply all that I need, then again I say I find it in this *Mantra*. Since He pervades every fibre of my being and of all of you, I derive from it the doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth and it should satisfy the cravings of all philosophical Communists. This *Mantra* tells me that I cannot hold as mine anything that belongs to God, and if my life and that of all who believe in this *Mantra* has to be a life of perfect dedication, it follows that it will have to be a life of continual service of our fellow-creatures.

This, I say, is my faith and should be the faith of all who call themselves Hindus. And I venture to suggest to my Christian and Mussalman friends that they will find

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nothing more in their scriptures, if they will search them. I do not wish to hide from you the fact that I am not unaware of many superstitions that go under the name of Hinduism. I am most painfully conscious of all superstitions that are to be found masquerading as Hinduism, and I have no hesitation to call a spade a spade. I have not hesitated to describe untouchability as the greatest of these superstitions. But in spite of them all, I remain a Hindu. For, I do not believe that these superstitions form part of Hinduism. The very cannons of interpretation laid down by Hinduism teach me that whatever is inconsistent with the truth I have expounded to you and what is hidden in the *Mantra* I have named, must be summarily rejected as not belonging to Hinduism.

We all, consciously or unconsciously, pine and strive for peace on earth and goodwill amongst mankind. I am convinced that we shall find neither peace nor goodwill among men and women through strife among men of different religions, through disputation among them. We shall find truth and peace and goodwill, if we approach the humblest of mankind in a prayerful spirit.[70]

Message of Hinduism

THE whole of Hinduism could be summed up in the first verse of *Ishopanishad*. If all other Hindu scriptures happened to be reduced to ashes and to go out of the memory of men, and if only that one verse were to abide with us, the destruction would be no loss. Hinduism would even then remain with us. The original Sanskrit of the *Mantra* is perhaps as easy as anybody learning Sanskrit could possibly wish. This *Upanishad* enjoys the reputation of being part of the original *Vedas*. It is the shortest *Upanishad* known to us. But, as I have said, if we had only the first verse of that *Upanishad* remaining with us,

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it would be enough to supply all our wants. Let me repeat that *Mantra* in my faulty Sanskrit pronunciation:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंचं जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा मा गृधः कस्यसिद्धनम् ॥

Those who know a little bit of Sanskrit will find that there is nothing abstruse there that you find in other *Vedic Mantras*, and its meaning is simply this: All that there is in this Universe, great or small, including the tiniest atom, is pervaded by God, known as Creator or Lord. *Isha* means the Ruler, and He who is the Creator naturally by that very right becomes the Ruler, too. And here in this verse the seer has chosen no other epithet for the Deity but that of the Ruler, and he has excepted nothing from His jurisdiction. He says everything that we see is pervaded by the Deity, and from that naturally the other parts of the *Mantra* follow. Thus, he says: Renounce everything, *i.e.*, everything that is in this Universe, the whole of the Universe, and not only this tiny globe of ours, renounce it. He asks us to renounce it, as we are such insignificant atoms that if we had any idea of possession it would seem ludicrous. And then, says the *Rishi*, the reward of renunciation is जीथाभुः *i.e.*, enjoyment of all you need. But there is a meaning about the word 'enjoy'—you might as well say use, eat, etc.,—but it means that you may not take more than is necessary for your growth. Therefore, this enjoyment or use is limited by two conditions. One is the act of renunciation or, as the author of the *Bhagavat* would say, enjoy in the spirit of कृष्णार्पणमस्तुर्त्सवम् And every day in the morning everyone who believes in *Bhagavat Dharma* has to dedicate his thoughts, words and deeds to Krishna, and not until he has performed that daily act of renunciation or dedication has he the right of touching anything or drinking even a cup of water. And when a man has performed that act of renunciation and dedica-

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tion, he derives from that act the right of eating, drinking clothing and housing himself to the extent necessary for his daily life. Therefore, take it as you like, either in the sense that the enjoyment or use is the reward of renunciation, or that the renunciation is the condition of enjoyment, renunciation is essential for our very existence, for our soul. And, as if that condition given in the *Mantra* was incomplete, the *Rishi* hastened to complete it by adding: 'Do not covet what belongs to another.' Now, I suggest to you that the whole of the philosophy or religion found in any part of the world is contained in this *Mantra*, and it excludes everything contrary to it. According to the canons of interpretation, anything that is inconsistent with *Shruti*—and the *Ishopanishad* is a *Shruti*—is to be rejected altogether.

If all that there is in the Universe is pervaded by God, that is to say, if the *Brahmin* and the *Bhangi*, the learned man and the scavenger, the Ezhava and the *Pariah*, no matter what caste they belong to—if all these are pervaded by Lord God, in the light of this *Mantra*, there is none that is high and none that is low, all are absolutely equal, equal because all are the creatures of that Creator. And this is not a philosophical thing to be dished out of *Brahmins* or *Kshatriyas*, but it enunciates an eternal truth which admits of no reduction, no palliation. Therefore, we are all creatures and servants of one God. And if that is so, how can anyone dare to arrogate superiority to himself or herself over any other human being?[71]

Unity Underlying Religions

ONCE we are able to purge ourselves of untouchability, and with it the spirit of high and low, we shall realize the unity underlying all races and religions. In spite of the differences of races and religions, we shall learn to tolerate and respect one another and consider all human beings as

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children of one God and, therefore, brothers and sisters of one another. God is the Creator of all life; all His creatures are, therefore, equal in His eyes. Humanity is a gigantic tree having innumerable branches and leaves, and the same life throbs through them all.[72]

The idea of hereditary superiority and inferiority is, in my opinion, repugnant to the spirit of Hinduism which teaches oneness of all life in unequivocal terms. The religions of mankind are being examined and tested both analytically and synthetically. And I have no doubt that, if Hindus cling to untouchability, Hinduism and Hindus will be swept out of existence. I cling to Hinduism because it gives me all the solace I need, and because I have found in it no warrant for untouchability as we know it today.[73]

Once this canker is removed from Hinduism, Hindus, Mussalmans and others will sink their differences and will embrace one another as blood-brothers, and all communities will feel that they are branches of the same tree.[74]

We are too near the scene of tragedy to realize that this canker of untouchability has travelled far beyond its prescribed limits, and has sapped the very foundations of the whole nation. The touch-me-not spirit pervades the atmosphere. If this white ant is touched at its source, I feel certain that we shall soon forget the differences with regard to caste and caste, and religion and religion, and begin to believe that even as all Hindus are one and indivisible, so are Hindus, Mussalmans, Sikhs, Parsis, Jews and Christians branches of the same parent tree. Though religions are many, Religion is one. That is the lesson I would have us learn from the campaign against untouchability. And we will learn it, if we prosecute it in the religious spirit and with a determination that will not be resisted.[75]

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The Real Untouchables

GOD has created different faiths, just as he has the votaries thereof. How can I even secretly harbour the thought that my neighbour's faith is inferior to mine and wish that he should give up his faith and embrace mine? As a true and loyal friend, I can only wish and pray that he may live and grow perfect in his own faith. In God's house, there are many mansions and they are all equally holy. All the great religions of the world inculcate the equality and brotherhood of mankind and the virtue of toleration. The 'touch-me-not ism that disfigures the present-day Hinduism is a morbid growth. It only betrays a woodenness of the mind, a blind self-conceit. It is abhorrent alike to the spirit of religion and morality. The real untouchables are the impure thoughts that lurk in the mind: the lying, the covetousness and the deceit which mar our daily dealings. It is these whose contact is contaminating and ought to be shunned.[76]

If untouchability is removed in its fulness from the Hindu heart, it will have far-reaching consequences, inasmuch as it touches millions of human beings.... If untouchability is really removed from the Hindu heart, that is, if the high-caste Hindus purge themselves of this terrible taint, we shall soon discover that we are all one and not different peoples, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, whatever we may call ourselves. We shall feel the unity, once the barrier of untouchability is removed. Untouchability is a hydra-headed monster, appearing in many shapes. Some of them are very subtle. If I have jealousy for any human being, that also is a species of untouchability. I do not know if my dream about the removal of untouchability will be fully realized while I am living. All those who are religiously inclined, those who believe not in formal religion but in the essence of

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religion, cannot but believe in the removal of a subtle type of untouchability that affects the lives of a vast mass of humanity. If Hindu hearts can be purged of this evil, our eyes of understanding will be more and more opened. It is not possible to estimate the gain to humanity when untouchability is really removed.[77]

Doctrine of Unity in Diversity

THERE is untouchability in the *Shastras* in a particular sense. Anger, lust and other evil passions raging in the heart are the real untouchables. It is a prostitution of *Shastras* to interpret them as sanctioning the distinctions we observe today. A true man of piety will consider himself a sinner and, therefore, untouchable. We, in our haughtiness, have hitherto misinterpreted the *Shastras* and have raised a sin to the status of a religious tenet. I claim to be a true *Sanatanist*, because I make the greatest effort I can to live up to the truth as I see it. Diversity there certainly is in the world, but it means neither inequality nor untouchability. An elephant and an ant are dissimilar. Nevertheless, God has said that they are equal in His eyes. The inner oneness pervades all life. The forms are many, but the informing spirit is one. How can there be room for distinctions of high and low where there is this all-embracing fundamental unity underlying the outward diversity? For that is a fact meeting you at every step in daily life. The final goal of all religions is to realize this essential oneness.

One can hear in these words a powerful echo of the doctrine of unity in diversity preached twelve centuries ago. The doctrine will have to be preached and lived again and again till man comes to his own.[78]

Equality in Hinduism

PURE Hinduism has no inequality. All are equal in the

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eye of God. All the religions in the world are on their trial today. I want Hinduism to come out of the test with full marks.[79]

In the purest type of Hinduism a *Brahmin,* an ant, an elephant and a dog-eater (*Shwapacha*) are of the same status. And because our philosophy is so high, and we have failed to live up to it, that very philosophy today stinks in our nostrils. Hinduism insists on the brotherhood not only of all mankind, but of all that lives. It is a conception which makes one giddy, but we have to work up to it. The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes we shall have peace on earth and goodwill among men.[80]

Mine is no narrow creed. It is one of realizing the essential Brotherhood of Man. To my mind, the message of the *Vedas* is unity of God and unity of all life in one God.[81]

The Chief Value of Hinduism

THE chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that ALL life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, *i.e.,* all life coming from the One Universal Source, call it *Allah,* God or *Parameshwara.* There is in Hinduism a scripture called *Vishnusahasranama* which simply means 'One Thousand Names of God'. These one thousand names do not mean that God is limited to those names, but that He has as many names as you can possibly give Him. You may give Him as many names as you like, provided it is one God without a second, whose name you are invoking. That also means that He is nameless, too.

This unity of ALL life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not to human beings alone, but

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says that it is possible for all God's creatures. It may be that it is not possible, save through the human form, but that does not make man the Lord of creation. It makes him the servant of God's creation. Now, when we talk of Brotherhood of Man, we stop there, and feel that all other life is there for man to exploit for his own purposes. But Hinduism excludes all exploitation. There is no limit whatsoever to the measure of sacrifice that one may make in order to realize this oneness with all life, but certainly the immensity of the ideal sets a limit to your wants. That, you will see, is the antithesis of the position of the modern civilization which says: 'Increase your wants.' Those who hold that belief think that increase of wants means an increase of knowledge whereby you understand the Infinite better. On the contrary, Hinduism rules out indulgence and multiplication of wants as these hamper one's growth to the ultimate identity with the Universal Self.[82]

Sikhism

I PERSONALLY do not see any difference between Sikhism and Hinduism. They are varieties of the same faith. When I read the *Granth Saheb* written in Devanagari characters, I have not much difficulty in following the language. The thought in the various *Bhajans* of Nanak Saheb and other *Gurus* is derived from the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*.[83]

The Sikhs are, in my opinion, a part of the Hindu community. Millions of Hindus believe in Guru Nanak and the *Granth Saheb* is filled with the Hindu spirit and Hindu legends.[84]

My belief about the Sikh *Gurus* is that they were all deeply religious teachers and reformers, that they were all Hindus and that Guru Govind Singh was one of the greatest defenders of Hinduism. I believe, too, that he

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drew the sword in its defence. But I cannot judge his actions, nor can I use him as my model so far as his resort to the sword is concerned. What I would have done had I lived in his times and held the same views that I hold now, I do not know. Such speculation I regard as perfect waste of time. I do not regard Sikhism as a religion distinct from Hinduism. I regard it as part of Hinduism and the reformation in the same sense that Vaishnavism is. I read in the Yeravda prison all the writings that I could lay my hands upon regarding the Sikhs. I read portions of the *Granth Saheb*. Its deeply spiritual and moral tone I found to be uplifting. In the collection of hymns we have at the *Ashram*, we have some of Guru Nanak's also. At the same time, I do not quarrel with the Sikhs for considering, if they wish, Sikhism as totally distinct from Hinduism. And when during my reference to Sikhism as part of Hinduism displeased them, I ceased to refer to it as such. But the Sikh friends will pardon me for avowing my belief when I am asked to express my opinion about Sikhism.[85]

Jainism

DURING my tour in Maharashtra, I found many Jains telling me that they were a community apart from Hindus. I have never understood the Jain objection, because there is so much in common between Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. I could somewhat understand the Arya Samaj objection, because the Samajists are, if one may say so without giving offence, fanatically hostile to idol-worship and *Puranic* literature and everything outside the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. But Jainism and Buddhism have, so far as I know, no such quarrel with Hinduism. Indeed, Buddhism and Jainism are mighty reforms in Hinduism. Buddhism rightly insisted on internal purity. Its appeal went straight to the heart. It broke down

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arrogant assumption of superiority. Jainism represents the highest flight of logic. It has taken nothing for granted and has endeavoured to prove metaphysical truth by challenging the intellect. In my opinion, we have hardly touched the vast literature that these two reform movements have produced.[86]

The Arya Samaj

I HAVE profound respect for Dayananda Saraswati. I think that he has rendered great service to Hinduism. His bravery was unquestioned. But he made his Hinduism narrow. I have read the *Satyaratha Prakash*, the Arya Samaj *Bible*. Friends sent me three copies of it, whilst I was resting in the Yeravda Jail. I have not read a more disappointing book from a reformer so great. He has claimed to stand for Truth and nothing less. But he has unconsciously misrepresented Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism itself. One having even a cursory acquaintance with these faiths could easily discover the errors into which the great reformer was betrayed. He has tried to make narrow one of the most tolerant and liberal of faiths on the face of the earth. And an iconoclast though he was, he has succeeded in enthroning idolatry in the subtlest form. For, he has idolized the letter of the *Vedas* and tried to prove the existence in the *Vedas* of everything known to science. The Arya Samaj flourishes, in my humble opinion, not because of the inherent merit of the teachings of the *Satyaratha Prakash*, but because of the great and lofty character of the founder. Wherever you find Arya Samajists, there is life and energy. But having a narrow outlook and a pugnacious habit, they either quarrel with people of other denominations or, failing them, with one another. Needless to say, I mean no offence. I love the Samajists for I have many co-workers from among them. It is my love that has spoken.[87]

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I am not their enemy. I claim to be their friend. Time will prove my friendship.... I know the purifying work that the Arya Samaj has done. I know that it has laid its finger on many abuses that have soiled Hinduism. But no one can live on his capital. I want them to outlive the latter and extend the spirit of their reform. Their *Shuddhi* propaganda savours of the Christian propaganda. I would like them to rise higher. If they will insist upon reform from within, it will tax all their energy and take up all their time. Let them Hinduise the Hindu if they believe with me that Arya Samaj is a part of Hinduism. If they consider it as distinct from Hinduism, I fear it will be a hard task for them to convert the Hindus. Let them ascertain where they stand.... The Samaj has a great future if it can outgrow what has appeared to me its narrowness. If the Samajists think there is no room for expansion, I shall feel sorry. I ask them in that case not to be irritated because I cannot see their liberalism. They should charitably overlook my blindness and patiently endeavour to remove it.[88]

In spite of the opinion I have expressed, I claim to be one of the many humble admirers of the founder of the Samaj. He pointed out the many abuses that were corrupting the Hindu society. He inculcated a taste for Sanskrit learning. He challenged superstitious beliefs. By the chastity of his own life, he raised the tone of the society in which he lived. He taught fearlessness and he gave a new hope to many a despairing youth. Nor am I oblivious of his many services to the national cause. The Samaj has supplied it with many true and self-sacrificing workers. It has encouraged female education among Hindu girls as perhaps no other Hindu institution save the Brahmo Samaj has done.

Whilst, therefore, I am unable to withdraw a single

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word of my criticism of the Samaj, the *Satyarath Prakash* and Rishi Dayanand, I repeat that my criticism is that of a friend with the desire that the Samaj may render greater service by ridding itself of the shortcomings to which I have drawn attention. I want it to march with the times, give up the polemical spirit, and whilst adhering to its own opinions extend that toleration to other faiths which it claims for itself.[89]

The Brahmo Samaj

ALTHOUGH I cannot claim to have studied the history of the Brahmo Samaj, I do claim to have a close connection with the members of the Brahmo Samaj extending over several years. It dates as far back as 1896, when I first visited Calcutta. In 1901, I came in contact with several eminent members of the Brahmo Samaj through Gokhale and Dr. P. C. Ray. I used to visit occasionally the Samaj Mandir, and listen to the sermons of the late Pratap Chandra Mazumdar. I also came in touch with the late Pandit Shivanath Shastri.

These experiences were enough to convince me that the Brahmo Samaj has rendered a great service to Hinduism, and that it has rescued the educated classes of India, especially Bengal, from unbelief. I have always regarded it as a movement essentially designed for the educated classes. Though religion in India sometimes takes the form of superstition, wooden formalism and hysterics, I cannot escape the conviction that a man cannot long remain an unbeliever in India. But the faith of the educated class in the early part of the nineteenth century was in danger, and it was Ram Mohan Roy who came to their rescue. I have heard that he had come under the influence of Christian missionaries and that he had made a deep study of Persian and Arabic. There can be no question about his scholarship or about his catholicity.

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He made a deep study of Hinduism, especially the religion of the *Vedas*, and then allowed himself to be influenced by the essential principles of Christianity and Islam. As a result, he saw that there was for him no escape from inaugurating a new movement to liberalize the existing Hinduism, which had been overgrown with superstitious weeds. Sacrifice of animals and social evils were flourishing in the name of Hinduism. How could the educated class tolerate it? It was open to Ram Mohan Roy to rest content with individual dissociation from the evils. But he was a reformer. He could not afford to hide his light under a bushel, he gave public expression to his views, secured a following and founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828.

But it would have languished, had not a man of great spiritual gifts like Maharishi Devendranath Tagore joined it. It is for the future historian to estimate the Tagore's contribution to the intellectual and spiritual life of Bengal, India, and even the world. Rabindranath Tagore's contribution in the direction has been stupendous. We cannot adequately estimate it, even as men living in the valleys of the Himalayas cannot adequately visualize their sublimity. And the Tagores received their inspiration from the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj liberated Reason, and left room enough for Faith. There was once a danger of the Brahmo Samaj severing its tie with Hinduism or the religion of the *Vedas*, but the Maharishi's *tapasya* and knowledge rescued the Brahmo Samaj from that catastrophe. It is due to him that the Samaj remained part of Hinduism.

One may not measure the contribution of the Brahmo Samaj from the number of its adherents. The Brahmos are indeed very few, but their influence has been great

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and good. The service of the Brahmo Samaj lies in its liberalizing and nationalizing Hinduism. It has always cultivated a toleration for other faiths and other movements, it has tried to keep the fountain source of religion pure and to hold up the ideal of pure worship of the Supreme Being.

True religion is not narrow dogma. It is not external observance. It is faith in God, and living in the presence of God; it means faith in a future life, in Truth and *Ahimsa*. There prevails today a sort of apathy towards the things of the spirit. Our temples appear today to be meant only for the simple and the ignorant. Few visit real temples of God. Let the educated class take up the work of reform in this direction.

I am inundated with letters from young men who write frankly about their evil habits and about the void that their unbelief has made in their lives. No mere medical advice can bring them relief. I can only tell them that there is no way but that of surrender to and trust in God and His grace. Let us all give the living religion in our lives the place it deserves. Has not Akho Bhagat said:

> "Live as you will, but so
> As to realize God."[80]

The Theosophy

I HAVE come to the conclusion that the Theosophy is Hinduism in theory, and that Hinduism is Theosophy in practice.

There are many admirable works in Theosophical literature which one may read with the greatest profit, but it appears to me that too much stress has been laid upon mental and intellectual studies, upon argument, upon the development of occult powers, and that the central

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idea of Theosophy, the Brotherhood of Mankind and the moral growth of man has been lost sight of in these. I do not wish to suggest that such studies have no place in a man's life, but I think that they should follow, not precede, the absolutely certain course which is necessary for every life. There are certain maxims of life which we have to weave into our very being, before we can at all follow the great scriptures.

When a man desires to qualify in any science, he has first of all to pass an entrance examination, but we seem to think that when we take up a religious book, no previous preparation in any other direction is necessary, but that we can read these scriptures untaught and interpret them for ourselves; and this attitude of mind is considered to be real independence of spirit. In my opinion, it is nothing but sheer licence taken with things of which we have not the slightest knowledge. We are told in all the Hindu scriptures that before we can even handle these books, we must cultivate absolutely pure and truthful lives, we must learn to control our passions which take us away from the central point.

The mind has been likened to an intoxicated monkey, and so it is. If we were to analyze our minds, we would find that we have very little reason to think ill of others, and would begin to think ill of ourselves; for, we would find that we harbour within ourselves robbers and murderers—terms used by us so glibly in connection with others. I wish that we would recognize a limitation in regard to our studies, and that such limitation, instead of hampering our activity, would further our strength and enable us to soar higher.

I do not think it at all a part of our life to extend its scope, but think it our duty to intensify it both with

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reference to our studies and to our activities; for if a man concentrates his attention on a particular thing or idea in life, he is likely to make much better use of himself and of his opportunities than if he divided his attention between this, that and the next thing.

Hindu sages have told us that to live the life, no matter how hampered it might be, no matter with what limitations, is infinitely superior to having a mental grasp of things Divine. They have taught us that until one by one and step by step, we have woven these things into our lives, we would not be able to have a grasp of the whole of the Divine teaching; and so if you want to live the real life, it is not to be lived in Theosophical libraries, but it is to be lived in the world around you, in the real practice of the little teaching that you might have been able to grasp.[91]

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CHAPTER VII

BUDDHISM

Message to the Buddhists

YOU do not know perhaps that one of my sons, the eldest boy, accused me of being a follower of the Buddha, and some of my Hindu countrymen also do not hesitate to accuse me of spreading the Buddhistic teaching under the guise of *Sanatana* Hinduism. I sympathize with my son's accusations and the accusations of my Hindu friends. And, sometimes, I feel even proud of being accused of being a follower of the Buddha, and I have no hesitation in declaring that I owe a great deal to the inspiration that I have derived from the life of the Enlightened One.

Though what passes under the name of Buddhism might have been driven out of India, the life of the Buddha and his teachings are by no means driven out of India. It is my deliberate opinion that the essential part of the teachings of the Buddha now forms an integral part of Hinduism. It is impossible for Hindu India today to retrace her steps and go behind the great reformation that Gautama effected in Hinduism. By his immense sacrifice, by his great renunciation and by the immaculate purity of his life, he left an indelible impress upon Hinduism, and Hinduism owes an eternal debt of gratitude to that great teacher. And if you will forgive me for saying so, and if you will also give me the permission to say so, I would venture to tell you that what Hinduism did not assimilate of what passes as Buddhism today, was not an essential part of Buddha's life and his teachings.

Hinduism and Buddhism

IT is my fixed opinion that Buddhism or rather the teaching of Buddha found its full fruition in India, and it

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could not be otherwise, for Gautama was himself a Hindu of Hindus. He was saturated with the best that was in Hinduism, and he gave life to some of the teachings that were buried in the *Vedas* and which were overgrown with weeds. His great Hindu spirit cut its way through the forest of words, meaningless words, which had overlaid the golden truth that was in the *Vedas*. He made some of the words in the *Vedas* yield a meaning to which the men of his generation were utter strangers, and he found in India the most congenial soil.

And wherever the Buddha went, he was followed by and surrounded not by non-Hinduism but Hindus, those who were themselves saturated with the *Vedic* law.

But the Buddha's teaching like his heart was all-expanding and all-embracing and so it has survived his own body and swept across the face of the earth. And at the risk of being called a follower of Buddha, I claim this achievement as a triumph of Hinduism. Buddha never rejected Hinduism, but he broadened its base. He gave it a new life and a new interpretation.

But here comes the point where I shall use your forgiveness and your generosity, and I want to submit to you that the teaching of Buddha was not assimilated in its fullness whether it was in Ceylon, or in Burma, or in China or in Tibet. I know my own limitations. I lay no claim to scholarship in Buddhistic law. Probably, a Fifth Form boy from Nalanda Vidyalaya would plough me in a Buddhist catechism. But I should be false to you and false to myself if I did not declare what my heart believes.

The Belief in God

YOU and those who call themselves Buddhists outside India have no doubt taken in a very large measure the teaching of the Buddha, but when I examine your life

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and when I cross-question the friends from Ceylon, Burma, China or Tibet, I feel confounded to find so many inconsistencies between what I have come to understand as the central fact of Buddha's life and your own practice.

The first is the belief in an All-pervading Providence, called God. I have heard it contended times without number, and I have read in books also claiming to express the spirit of Buddhism, that Buddha did not believe in God. In my humble opinion, such a belief contradicts the very central fact of Buddha's teaching. In my humble opinion, the confusion has arisen over his rejection and just rejection of all the base things that passed in his generation under the name of God. He undoubtedly rejected the notion that a being called God was actuated by malice, could repent of his actions, and like the kings of the earth could possibly be open to temptations and bribes and could possibly have favourites. His whole soul rose in mighty indignation against the belief that a being called God required for his satisfaction the living blood of animals in order that he might be pleased,—animals who were his own creation. He, therefore, reinstated God in the right place and dethroned the usurper who for the time being seemed to occupy that White Throne. He emphasized and re-declared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral government of this Universe. He unhesitatingly said that the Law was God Himself.

What is Nirvana?

GOD'S laws are eternal and unalterable and not separable from God Himself. It is an indispensable condition of His very perfection. And hence the great confusion that Buddha disbelieved in God and simply believed in the Moral Law, and because of this confusion about God Him-

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self, arose the confusion about the proper understanding of the great word *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is undoubtedly not utter extinction. So far as I have been able to understand the central fact of Buddha's life, *Nirvana* is utter extinction of all that is base in us, all that is vicious in us, all that is corrupt and corruptible in us. *Nirvana* is not like the black, dead peace of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the Eternal.

Buddha's Greatest Contribution

THE third point is the low estimation in which the idea of sanctity of all life came to be held in its travels outside India. Great as Buddha's contribution to humanity was in restoring God to His eternal place, in my humble opinion greater still was his contribution to humanity in his exacting regard for all life, be it ever so low. I am aware that his own India did not rise to the height that he would fain have seen India occupy.

But the teaching of Buddha, when it became Buddhism and travelled outside, came to mean that sacredness of animal life had not the sense that it had with an ordimary man. I am not aware of the exact practice and belief of Ceylonese Buddhism in this matter, but I am aware what shape it has taken in Burma and China. In Burma, especially the Burmese Buddhists will not kill a single animal, but do not mind others killing the animals for them and dishing the carcases for them for their food.

Now, if there was any teacher in the world who insisted upon the inexorable Law of Cause and Effect, it was inevitably Gautama, and yet my friends, the Buddhists outside India, would, if they could, avoid the effects of their own acts. But I must not put an undue strain upon your patience. I have but lightly touched

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upon some of the points which I think it my duty to bring to your notice, and in all earnestness and equal humility I present them for your serious consideration.[1]

Teaching of Buddhism

Q. Buddhism was driven out of India because *Brahmins* dominated the organization. Similarly, they will drive Hinduism out, if it does not serve their end.

A. Let them dare. But I am certain that Buddhism has not gone out of India. India is the country that imbibed most of the spirit of the Buddha. Buddhism must be distinguished from the spirit of the Buddha, as well as Christianity from the spirit of the Christ. They were successful in driving out Buddhism, because they had assimilated the central teaching of the Buddha.[2]

In my opinion, the teaching of Gautama Buddha was not a new religion. In so far as I have been able to study those lofty teachings, I have come to the conclusion —and that conclusion I arrived long before now—that Gautama was one of the greatest of Hindu reformers, and that he left upon the people of his own time and upon the future generations an indelible impress of that reformation.[3]

Plea for Buddhistic Revival

MY first introduction to any religious study was through a single book, *viz.*, Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, which fascinated and engrossed me. Ever since, the spirit of Buddha has haunted me, so much so that I have been accused of being a Buddhist in disguise. I accept the accusation as a compliment though I know that if I make any such claim, it would be summarily rejected by orthodox Buddhists. As one, however, who has imbibed the spirit of Buddhism, I would re-assert in all humility, but unhesi-

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tatingly, if in a different language, what I said on the previous occasion.

Conditions of Study

THERE are some conditions laid down in Hinduism for a proper prayerful study of religions. They are of a universal character. Remember also that Gautama was a Hindu of Hindus. He was saturated with the spirit of Hinduism, with the *Vedic* spirit; he was born and bred up in those exhilarating surroundings, exhilarating for the spirit, and, so far as I am aware, he never rejected Hinduism, or the message of the *Vedas*. What he did was, therefore, to introduce a living reformation in the petrified faith that surrounded him.

I venture to suggest that your study of Buddhism will be incomplete unless you study the original sources from which the Master derived his inspiration, that is, unless you study Sanskrit and the Sanskrit scriptures. But your duty, if you are to understand the spirit of the Buddha and not the letter of Buddhism, does not end there. That study has those conditions which I am about to describe to you. Those conditions are that a man or a woman who approaches a study of religion has first of all to observe what are called the five *Yamas*. They are the five rules of self-restraint. Firstly, *Brahamacharya*, celibacy; the second is *Satya*, Truth; the third is *Ahimsa*, absolute innocence, not even hurting a fly; the next condition is *Asteya*, non-stealing, not merely not stealing in the ordinary sense in which the word is understood, but if you appropriate or even cast your greedy eyes on anything that is not your own, it becomes stealing. Lastly, *Aparigraha*—a man, who wants to possess worldly riches or other things, won't be fit really to understand the spirit of the Buddha. These are the indispensable conditions. There are other conditions, but I am going into these,

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because these are the fundamental ones, and Gautama, before he attained his knowledge, had conformed to all these rules, and conformed, as few of his contemporaries had ever done, to the spirit of those rules. I humbly suggest that you will not understand the spirit of the Buddha unless you have also yourselves conformed to these rules and then prayerfully tried to ascertain what the Master meant. It makes no difference that you know of him through all the books that have been written, but even these very books, I make bold to assure you, you will understand and you will interpret with a new light, immediately you have gone, first of all, through these preliminary observances.

Look what many critics of Islam have done – how they have torn the very book, that millions of Mussalmans swear by, to pieces and held up the teachings of Islam to scorn. They were not dishonest men who wrote this criticism; they were honest men, they were not men who were not trying to search the Truth, but they did not know the conditions that they had to fulfil before they could make any religious study.

Again, look at what the critics of Hinduism have done. I read many of those criticisms, trying to enter into the spirit of the critics, but came to the conclusion that they did not know the A.B.C. of Hinduism and that they were grossly misinterpreting Hinduism.

Take Christianity itself. Many Hindus have misinterpreted Christianity. They approach the *Bible*, the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament* in a carping spirit, with preconceived notions. But why talk of the Hindus? Have I not read books written by Englishmen who, pretending to consider themselves atheists, have turned the *Bible* upside down, and put all the fiery writings into the

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hands of innocent men and women and thereby done grave injury to the simple people who read them?

Spirit of Inquiry

TODAY the spirit of enquiry is abroad. We have got to deal with that spirit. The world is trying to seek the Truth, and thirsting for peace in the midst of this terrible strife. There is also the desire for knowing the Truth, but those who made a scientific study of religion and those who gave their lives for arriving at the Truth and those with whose bones the snows of the Himalayas are whitened, have left these treasures not merely for 300 millions of India, but they have left these treasures for every one who cares to understand them, and they have said: 'We cannot deliver the Truth to you.' It is incapable of being delivered through writings; it is incapable of being delivered with the lips; it is capable of being delivered only through life. It transcends reason. But it is not past experience. So they said: 'We tell you that such and such is the fact, but you will have to test it for yourselves. You will apply your reason, we do not want you to deaden your reason, but you yourselves, even as we, will come to the conclusion that reason which God has given is after all a limited thing, and that which is a limited thing will not be able to reach the Limitless. Therefore, go through these preliminary conditions, even as when you want to study Geometry or Algebra, you have to go through preliminary processes, however trying and tiresome. Observe them and then you will find that what we tell you with our own experience will be also yours.'

An Illustration

I WANT to take you through only one illustration as to how the teaching of Buddha is now not being observed.

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You believe that Gautama taught the world to treat even the lowest creatures equal to himself. He held the life of even the crawling things of the earth as precious as his own. It is an arrogant assumption to say that human beings are lords and masters of the lower creation. On the contrary, being endowed with greater things in life, they are trustees of the lower animal kingdom. And the great sage lived that truth in his own life. I read as a mere youngster the passage in the *Light of Asia* describing how the Master took the lamb on his shoulders in face of the arrogant and ignorant *Brahmins* who thought that by offering the blood of these innocent lambs they were pleasing God, and he dared them to sacrifice a single one of them. His very presence softened the stony hearts of the *Brahmins*. They looked up to the Master, they threw away their deadly knives and every one of those animals was saved.

Was this message given to the world in order to falsify it, as it is being falsified here? I feel that you are not true to the spirit of the Master's teachings so long as you do not regard all animal creation as sacred, and you cannot do so, so long as you do not abstain from meat and delude yourselves into the belief that you are not guilty of the crime of that slaughter because some one else killed the animals for you. You entrench yourselves behind the wall of traditions. You say that the Master never prohibited meat-eating. I do not think so. If you would approach the teachings of the Master in the spirit indicated by me and rub in the spirit of tradition, you will have a different vision and a different meaning. You will find that when the Master said: 'I do not prohibit you from meat-eating,' he was preaching to a people who were, in Christian parlance, hard of hearts. It was because he wanted to make allowance for their weakness that he

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allowed them to eat it, and not because he did not know the logic of his own teaching. If animals could not be sacrificed to the gods above, how could they be sacrificed to the epicure in us? When he prohibited sacrifice, he knew what he was saying. Did he not know that the animals were sacrificed to be ultimately eaten? Why do they sacrifice thousands of sheep and goats to the Goddess Kali in Calcutta, be it said to their discredit and the discredit of Hinduism in spite of having received this message from the Hindu of Hindus – Gautama? Do they throw the carcases away in the Hooghly? No, they eat every bit of the meat with the greatest delight, thinking that it has been sanctified because of the presentation to Kali. So the Buddha said: 'If you want to do any sacrifice, sacrifice yourself, your lust, all your material ambition, all wordly ambition. That will be an ennobling sacrifice.' May the spirit of the Buddha enable you to measure and assimilate the meaning of the words that I have spoken to you![4]

Advice to the Hindus

MANY Hindus certainly repudiate the claim of Buddhism to be part and parcel of Hinduism. On the contrary, they delight in saying that they successfully drove Buddhism out of India. But I tell you that they did nothing of the kind. Buddha himself was a Hindu. He endeavoured to reform Hinduism. And he succeeded in his attempt to a very great extent, and what Hinduism did at that time was to assimilate and absorb all that was good and best in the teachings of the Buddha. And, on that account, I venture to say that Hinduism became broadened; and having assimilated the best of Buddhism, it is true that Hinduism drove out from India what might be termed the excrescences that had gathered round the teachings of Gautama. And the way in which you can

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demonstrate this to the Buddhists is by living the broadened Hinduism in their midst. The one thing that the Buddha showed India was that God was not a God who can be appeased by sacrificing innocent animals. On the contrary, he held that those who sacrificed animals in the hope of pleasing God were guilty of a double sin. So, if you will be true to Hinduism, you will take care that you will not defile a single temple of yours by indulging in animal sacrifice. I am prepared to declare against the whole of Hindu India that it is wrong, sinful, and criminal to sacrifice a single animal for the purpose of gaining any end whatsoever, or for the purpose of propitiating God.

Varna Gives Life, Caste Kills

THE second thing that Gautama taught was that all that caste means today—as it meant in his time also—was wholly wrong. That is to say, he abolished every distinction of superiority and inferiority that was even in his time eating into the vitals of Hinduism. But he did not abolish *Varnashrama Dharma*. *Varna Dharma* is not caste. There is nothing in common between caste and *Varna*. Whilst *Varna* gives life, caste kills it, and untouchability is the hatefullest expression of caste. You will, therefore, banish untouchability from your midst. I make bold to say that there is no warrant whatsoever in Hinduism for untouchability as it is practised today. If, therefore, you want to live your Hinduism in its purity in the midst of Buddhist countrymen, you will take care that you will not consider a single human being as an untouchable. Unfortunately, the Buddhists have themselves borrowed this curse from Hindus. They who should never have had this institution of caste have caste in their midst. For Heaven's sake, forget that some are high but others are low; remember that you are all Hindus—brothers in arms.

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Make Advances to Other Faiths

THERE are still certain things that demand your attention. You have to live at the present moment in a world which has Christians and Mussalmans, great communities owning great faiths.... And if I know Hinduism aright, Hinduism is nothing if it is not tolerant and generous to every other faith. It is your duty to regard them as your brothers. Unless you do so, you will never evolve the truly national spirit that is necessary, and, therefore, you will not evolve the necessary Hindu and the humanitarian spirit.... And if you will get rid of the wretched caste-spirit which has crept into Hinduism, you will find that all the difficulties will disappear.

Lastly, I know no solution of the many difficulties that face the whole of the human family except the two things. Speak the truth and remain non-violent also at any cost. I know as certainly as I know that if I could but persuade you to understand the spirit of these two things and act up to them, every one of our difficulties will disappear like straws before wind, and God will descend from His Great White Throne and live in your midst and He will say: 'You Hindus have done well!'[5]

A Revival of Ancient Hindu Culture

IN Hindu culture, I venture to submit, Buddhistic culture is necessarily included for the simple reason that Buddha himself was an Indian; not only an Indian, but a Hindu amongst Hindus. I have never seen anything in the life of Gautama to warrant the belief that he renounced Hinduism and adopted a new faith. My task becomes easy when I consider also that Jesus himself was an Asiatic and, therefore, it becomes a question really to consider what Asiatic or ancient Asiatic culture is. For that matter, then, Mohammed was also an Asiatic.

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Since you can only wish to revive all that is noble and all that is permanent in ancient culture, your revival necessarily must not be antagonistic to any of these faiths (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism etc.). The question then is to find out the common factor, the greatest common measure belonging to all these great faiths. And thus you will come, according to my own estimate of things noble and great, to this very simple factor, *viz.*, that you want to be truthful and non-violent, for Truth and Non-violence are common to all these great faiths.

You cannot possibly wish to revive many of the customs that you and I might have even forgotten, that may have at one time formed part of Hinduism.

I recall one great thought that the late Justice Ranade expressed when he was speaking of the revival of ancient culture, and he told his audience that it would be difficult for any single person in the audience to say exactly what ancient culture was, and when that culture ceased to be ancient and began to be modern. He also said that a prudent man would not swear by anything because it was ancient, but he told the audience that any culture, ancient or modern, must be submitted to the test of reason and experience.

I am obliged to utter this warning . . . because of so many reactionary forces gathering around us not only here, but throughout the world. I see from my own experience in India that many who are professing to revive ancient culture do not hesitate under the name of that revival to revive old superstitions and prejudices. Ancient tradition and ancient lore have been dragged almost out of the tomb to justify the hideous doctrine of untouchability. A similar attempt is now being made to justify the institution of *Devadasis*.

You will not, therefore, consider that I have given

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you a laboured statement in warning you against being misled into wrong-doing under the name of revival of ancient culture. Perhaps you will understand the significance of this warning, coming as it does from a man who is himself not only a lover of ancient culture, but has been endeavouring to reproduce in his own life, to the best of his ability, all that is noble, that is permanent in ancient culture.

In trying to explore the hidden treasures of ancient culture, I have come upon this inestimable boon that all that is permanent in ancient Hindu culture is also to be found in the teachings of Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and Zoroaster. So, I have come to this workable arrangement for myself. If I find anything in Hinduism which is ancient but repugnant to my Christian brother or my Mussalman brother, I immediately begin to fidget and doubt the ancientness of that claim. So, I came by a process of examination to this irresistible conclusion that there was nothing so very ancient in this world as these two good old things—Truth and Non-violence.

And working along these lines of Truth and Non-violence, I also discovered that I must not attempt to revive ancient practices if they were inconsistent with, call it if you will, modern life as it must be lived. Ancient practices may have been perfectly good and perhaps absolutely necessary at the time when those practices were adopted, but they might be entirely out of date with modern needs and still not be contrary to Truth or Non-violence.

Then, you can see how safe the road becomes in front of you and me when we summarily and mercilessly reject untouchability, *Devadasi* institution, drunkenness, sacrifice of animals in the very name of God whom we call Compassionate, All-Merciful, Forgiving. We can unhesitat-

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ingly and summarily reject all these things, because they do not appeal to our moral sense. So much with reference to the negative side of it, but there is a positive side to it which is just as important as the negative.

Necessary Corollary

IN putting before you the positive side, let me draw for you one very necessary corollary to the Doctrine of Non-violence. The corollary or deduction is this: that if we are to be non-violent, we must then not wish for anything on this earth which the meanest or the lowest of human beings cannot have. If that is a sound proposition—and I claim that it is a direct corollary from the Doctrine of Non-violence—then if you accept it, then it follows that we may not barter away our ancient simplicity for anything on this earth. Now, perhaps you will understand my determined opposition to the modern rush, the hypnotic dazzle that seems almost to overcome us with such violent force from the West.

I have taken great pains in my writings as also in my speeches to distinguish between the modern methods adopted in the West, the multiplicity of wants and material comforts, and the essential teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount*. So, in the opening sentences I threw out the hint of what was to come when I told you that after all Jesus was an Asiatic, Mohammed was an Asiatic. But drawing that sharp distinction between the teachings and message of Jesus and what is today going on in America, in England and other parts of the West, I have been able to live at peace with thousands upon thousands of my Christian friends in South Africa and now, because the circle is growing ever larger, throughout the world.

So, you Hindus and Buddhists, if you will be true to your ancient culture, you will refuse to have anything whatsoever to do with this hypnotic dazzle, even though

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it may come to you in the so-called Christian garb. If you have an immovable faith in yourselves, if you will also cultivate inexhaustible patience, you will find that the Christian friends, even though they may come to you with the Western dazzle behind them, will shed all that dazzle and be converted to the doctrine of simplicity which alone can satisfy the test of the corollary that I have ventured to draw before you.[6]

Did Not Buddha Pray?

Dr. Fabri: I know very highly developed men to whom belief in God gives incredible comfort and help in the building of character. But there are some great spirits that can do without it. That is what Buddhism has taught me.

Gandhiji: But Buddhism is one long prayer.

Dr. Fabri: Buddha asked everyone to find salvation from himself. He never prayed, he meditated.

Gandhiji: Call it by whatever name you like, it is the same thing. Look at his statues.

Dr. Fabri: But they are not true to life. They are 400 years later than his death.

Gandhiji: Well, give me your own history of Buddha as you may have discovered it. I will prove that he was a praying Buddha. The intellectual conception does not satisfy me. I have not given you a perfect and full definition as you cannot describe your own thought. The very effort to describe is a limitation. It defies analysis and you have nothing but scepticism as the residue.[7]

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CHAPTER VIII

ISLAM

True Islam

A MUSLIM correspondent sends a letter which is given below barring personal references:

"Islam is a universal religion and its great message is to strive and know the Truth. The following verses of Maulana Jalaluddin Roomi will explain what great effort is needed even for great souls like Caliph Ali to know the Truth:

1. The Prophet said to Ali: 'O Ali!
   Thou art the Lion of God, a hero most valiant,
   Yet confide not in thine lion-like valour;
   But seek refuge under the palm trees of the Truth,
   Come under the shadow of the Man of Reason,
   Thou canst not find it in the road of the traditionist.
   His shadow of earth is as that of Mount Qaaf,
   His spirit is as a *Simurgh* soaring on high.
   Were I to tell his praises till the last day,
   My words would not be too many nor admit of curtailment;
   That sun is hidden in the form of a man,
   Understand me: *Allah* knows the Truth!'

2. 'Pass over names and look to qualities
   So that qualities may lead thee to essence;
   The differences of sects arise from His names
   When they pierce to His essence, they find His peace.'

The great tragedy of Muslim India today is that it has entangled itself in names and has ignored the teachings of Islam, whereby it could have passed over to knowing the reality. They act according to their own natures, yet they attribute their actions to Islam forgetting that:

'The moon sheds her light and the dogs howl;
Everyone acts according to his nature;
To each his office is allotted by the Divine decree.
I swear by Ages, indeed man is at total loss
Except those who believe and do good deeds,
And those who preach for Truth and Non-violence.'

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I would request you kindly to avoid bringing the name of Islam when you refer to the actions of the Muslims, as the two are today different."

Would that this Islam might be exhibited in deeds and the correspondent's taunt dispelled![1]

I am reminded of a saying of the Prophet in which it is said that a man would be judged on the Day of Judgment not by what he professes by his lips, nor by whom he follows, but by what he has himself done to implement the teachings received by him.[2]

The Prophet and His Companions

I KNOW the Mussalman mind much better than I did two years ago. I was interested in the religious side of Urdu literature and, therefore, plunged as soon as I was able into Urdu religious books. Fates have always favoured me. Maulana Hasrat Mohani had sent to Mr. Manzar Ali *Leaves from the Lives of the Companions of the Prophet*. As he was teaching me Urdu, he passed the volumes on to me. And I went through them with the greatest diligence. The volumes, though they contain repetitions and would gain in lucidity for compression, were to me deeply interesting for the insight they gave me into the doings of the Prophet's many companions. How their lives were transformed, as if by magic, what devotion they showed to the Prophet, how utterly unmindful they became of worldly wealth, how they used power itself for showing the utter simplicity of their lives, how they were untouched by the lust for gold, how reckless they were of their own lives in a cause they held sacred, is all told with a wealth of detail that carries conviction with it. When one notes their lives and then the lives of the present day representatives of Islam in India, one is inclined to shed a tear of bitter grief.

I passed from the companions to the Prophet himself.

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The two bulky volumes written by Maulana Shibli are a creditable performance. But I have the same complaint about them that I have lodged about the diffuseness of the volumes devoted to the companions. But the diffuseness did not interfere with my interest to know how a Mussalman had treated the incidents of the life of one who has been almost uniformly maligned and abused in the West. When I closed the second volume, I was sorry there was not more for me to read of that great life.

There are incidents in it which I do not understand, there are some I cannot explain. But I did not approach the study as a critic or a scoffer. I wanted to know the best of the life of one who holds today undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind. And I found enough in the volumes to account for it. I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and his own mission. These, and not the sword, carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle.

As I do not regard any human being absolutely perfect, be he a prophet or an *Avatar*, it is unnecessary for me to be able to explain to the censor's satisfaction every detail of the Prophet's life. It is enough for me to know that he was a man among millions who tried to walk in the fear of God, died a poor man, wanted no grand mausoleum for his mortal remains, and who did not forget even on his death-bed the least of his creditors. The teaching of the Prophet is no more responsible for the degrading intolerance or questionable proselytizing methods that one sees around himself, than Hinduism is

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responsible for the degradation and intolerance of present day Hindus.

From the Prophet, I passed on to the two volumes devoted to the life of Umar—the unconquerable. As I pictured him before my mental eye walking to Jerusalem, upbraiding some of his followers for aping the pomp of their neighbours, refusing to pray in a Christian Church lest succeeding generations might claim to convert it into a mosque, granting the most liberal terms to the conquered Christians, and as I picture him declaring that the word of a follower of Islam, though pledged by one not authorized thereto, was as good as the written decree of the great Caliph himself, he commands my humble respect. His was an iron will. He weighed out the same justice to his daughter that he would weigh to an utter stranger. I fancy I understand the breaking of idols and wanton desecration of temples, the thoughtless intolerance of Hindu music now going on in our midst. These acts seem to me to be due to an utter misreading of the events in the life of the greatest of the Caliphs. I fear that the acts of this great and just man are being presented to the Mussalman masses in a most distorted fashion. I know that if he rose from his grave, he would disown the many acts of the so-called followers of Islam which are a crude caricature of those of the great Umar himself.[3]

A Religion of Peace

THE more I study that wonderful faith, the more convinced I become that the glory of Islam is due not to the sword but to the sufferings, the renunciation, and the nobility of its early Caliphs. Islam decayed when its followers, mistaking the evil for the good, dangled the sword in the face of man, and lost sight of the godliness, the humility, and austerity of its founder and his disciples. But I am not, at the present moment, concerned

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with showing that the basis of Islam, as of all religions, is not violence but suffering, not the taking of life but the giving of it.[4]

The sword is no emblem of Islam. But Islam was born in an environment where the sword was and still remains the supreme law. The message of Jesus has proved ineffective because the environment was unready to receive it. So, with the message of the Prophet. The sword is yet too much in evidence among Mussalmans. It must be sheathed, if Islam is to be what it means—Peace.[5]

I do regard Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. No doubt, there are differences in degree, but the object of these religions is peace. I know the passages that can be quoted from the *Quran* to the contrary. But so is it possible to quote passages from the *Vedas* to the contrary What is the meaning of imprecations pronounced against the *Anaryas*? Of course, these passages bear today a different meaning, but, at one time, they did wear a dreadful aspect. What is the meaning of the treatment of untouchables by us Hindus? Let not the pot call the kettle black. The fact is that we are growing. I have given my opinion that the followers of Islam are too free with the sword. But that is not due to the teaching of the *Quran*. That is due, in my opinion, to the environment in which Islam was born. Christianity has a bloody record against it not because Jesus was found wanting, but because the environment in which it spread was not responsive to his lofty teaching.

These two, Christianity and Islam, are after all religions of but yesterday. They are yet in the course of being interpreted. I reject the claim of *Maulvis* to give a final interpretation to the message of Mohammed, as I reject that of the Christian clergy to give a final inter-

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pretation to the message of Jesus. Both are being interpreted in the lives of those who are living these messages in silence and in perfect self-dedication. Bluster is no religion nor is vast learning stored in capacious brains. The seat of religion is in the heart. We, Hindus, Christians, Mussalmans and others have to write the interpretation of our respective faiths with our own crimson blood and not otherwise.[6]

Non-Violence in Islam

TIMES change, and systems decay. But it is my faith that, in the result, it is only non-violence and things that are based on non-violence that will endure. Nineteen hundred years ago, Christianity was born. The ministry of Jesus lasted for only three brief years. His teaching was misunderstood even during his own time and today Christianity is a denial of his central teaching: 'Love your enemy'. But what are nineteen hundred years for the spread of the central doctrine of a man's teaching?

Six centuries rolled by and Islam appeared on the scene. Many Mussalmans will not even allow me to say that Islam, as the word implies, is unadulterated peace. My reading of the *Quran* has convinced me that the basis of Islam is not violence. But here again thirteen hundred years are but a speck in the cycle of Time. I am convinced that both these great Faiths will live only to the extent that their followers imbibe the central teaching of non-violence. But it is not a thing to be grasped through mere intellect, it must sink into our hearts.[7]

Some Muslim friends tell me that Muslims will never subscribe to unadulterated non-violence. With them, they say, violence is as lawful and necessary as non-violence. The use of either depends upon circumstances. It does not need *Quranic* authority to justify the lawfulness of both. That is the well-known path the world has

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traversed through the ages. There is no such thing as unadulterated violence in the world. But I have heard it from many Muslim friends that the *Quran* teaches the use of non-violence. It regards forbearance as superior to vengeance. The very word Islam means peace, which is non-violence.[8]

Teaching of the Quran

I HAVE reverently studied many works on Islam. I have more than once read the *Quran*. My religion enables me, obliges me, to imbibe all that is good in all the great religions of the earth. This does not mean that I must accept the interpretation that may be put upon the message of the Prophet of Islam or any other Prophet. I must use the limited intelligence that God has given me to interpret the teachings bequeathed to mankind by the Prophets of the world. I am glad to find that Truth and Non-violence are taught by the *Holy Quran*. Surely, it is for every one of us to apply these principles to daily life according to the light given to us by God. Live and let live or mutual forbearance and toleration is the Law of Life. That is the lesson I have learnt from the *Quran*, the *Bible*, the *Zend Avestha* and the *Gita*.[9]

I do not propose to enter into any long argument about the interpretation of the *Quran*. Being a non-Muslim, I am at a disadvantage. If I began an argument, the natural retort would be: "How can you, a non-Muslim, interpret Muslim scriptures?" It would serve no purpose to answer back that I have the same reverence for Islam and the other faiths as I have for my own.

I am aware of verses in the *Quran* itself contradicting my interpretation. I suggest, nevertheless, that it is possible that the teaching of a book or a man's life may be different from isolated texts in a book or incidents in a life, however many the latter may be. The *Mahabharata*

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is the story of a bloody war. But I have maintained in the teeth of orthodox Hindu opposition that it is a book written to establish the futility of war and violence. . . Opinions will differ to the end of time. I plead for mutual forbearance.[10]

My reverent study of the scriptures of the world has led me to the belief that all register emphatic and unequivocal testimony in favour of non-violence being practised by all, not merely singly but collectively as well. In all humility, I have often felt that, having no axes to grind and having by nature a detached mind, I give a truer interpretation of the Hindu, Christian, Islamic or other scriptures. For this humble claim, I anticipate the forgiveness of *Sanatanists,* Christians and Mussalmans.[11]

I have never considered myself as a religious teacher. I have never asked anyone to disown his own faith in order to accept non-violence or my teaching. I have not known any religion to make violence obligatory. Most religions have permitted it, where non-violence is not possible. But I have no right to judge other religions. I entertain equal respect for all religions. I must if I expect others to respect mine.[12]

Need of a Master Key

I CERTAINLY regard Islam as one of the inspired religions, and, therefore, the *Holy Quran* as an inspired book and Mohammed as one of the prophets. But even so I regard Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism as inspired religions. The names of many of them have been already forgotten, for the simple reason that those religions and those prophets related to the particular ages for which and peoples for whom they flourished. Some principal religions are still extant. After a study of those religions, to the extent it was possible for me, I have come to the conclusion that, if it is proper and necessary to discover

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an underlying unity among all religions, a master-key is needed. That master-key is that of Truth and Non-violence. When I unlock the chest of a religion with this master-key, I do not find it difficult to discover its likeness with other religions. When you look at these religions as so many leaves of a tree they seem so different, but at the trunk they are one. Unless and until we realize this fundamental unity, wars in the name of religion will not cease. These are not confined to Hindus and Mussalmans alone. The pages of world history are soiled with the bloody accounts of these religious wars. Religion can be defended only by the purity of its adherents and their good deeds, never by their quarrels with those of other faiths.[13]

Gross Intolerance

"FOR some time, you seem to have made it a point to strengthen your arguments in favour of non-violence by frequent but invariably vague references to the *Holy Quran* and the teachings of Islam. It is quite obvious that you only seek to impress the Muslims thereby. No doubt, your right to preach your cherished doctrine is beyond all question... But can't you realize that nothing can offend the religious susceptibilities of a Mussalman more than to see a non-Muslim citing the scripture for his own purpose? Well, the Mussalmans have had thirteen centuries to know what the *Quran* teaches and to practise what it means. The Muslims, of course, do not need a *Mahatma* to interpret their own Holy Book. It would be better, indeed, if you take it from the Muslims what they have throughout the last thirteen centuries believed to be the teachings of their religion, rather than indulge in your own wishful interpretation.... Muslims have always shown themselves self-respecting enough not to allow their Holy Book becoming an instrument in non-Muslim hands. Your flattering words about Islam are of no avail. The fact stands out that you are a non-Muslim. Hence, the *Quran* cannot be the source of your ideas or ideals. You only turn to the *Quran* afterwards in order to popularise them among the Muslims."

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This letter is from an M.A. (Aligarh). He is a research scholar in the Muslim University.... I have sweet memories of Aligarh. I have more than once visited the great University. I have still associations with it. I think I am an honorary member of their club. I received the honour at the hands of the late Dr. Sir Ross Masood when he was Vice-Chancellor of the University. As for the *Holy Quran*, it was my Muslim clients and friends in South Africa who invited me to read it. They furnished me with Islamic literature. On my return to India, Muslim friends sent me copies of translations of the Holy Book. Among the senders was Dr. Mohammed Ali himself a translator, and the late Dr. Pickthal also a translator of the book. I was presented by the late Hakimsaheb Ajmal Khan with Maulana Shibli's translation. Have I changed or have the times so changed that it has become a crime for a non-Muslim like me to read and even dare to put his own interpretation upon the *Quran*? Many pious Muslims have remarked that I am a better Muslim than most Muslims in that I act in the spirit of the *Quran* and know more of the life of the Prophet than most Muslims. Whose testimony am I to accept—these Muslim friends' or the research scholar's and of those who think like him? I wonder.

The research scholar is right in imputing to me the desire to read my meaning into the *Quran*. Surely, there is no harm in it so long as I remain absolutely faithful to the text and approach my task with a prayerful and open mind. My correspondent should know as a scholar that an interpretation of a life or a book is not necessarily correct because it has been handed down for generations. An error does not cease to be one after a given number of repetitions by a given number of men for a given number of years. The *Biblical* texts are still being corrected.

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And many good Christians believe that the Christianity of the West is a negation of Christ's central teaching. It is just possible that the research scholar's views about the qualifications required for reading and interpreting the *Quran* and his own interpretation are wrong, and that my being a non-Muslim is no bar to my reading the *Quran* or interpreting it. And it is not at all impossible that my interpretation may be found to be right. It will be an evil day if the reading and interpreting of religious books are to be confined only to those who wear particular religious labels. I ask my correspondent and his companions, as their friend, to shed what in my opinion is their gross intolerance and give the same credit to others for seeing Truth as they claim for themselves. No one has a monopoly of Truth. All truth represented by imperfect humans that we are is relative. We can each act according to our lights. God alone knows the reality. That being so, it behoves research scholars at least to be humble and tolerant. Fanaticism and intolerance can neither conduce to research work, nor advance the cause they represent.[14]

Not a False Religion

IN my writing about Islam, I take the same care of its prestige that I do of Hinduism. I apply the same method of interpretation to it that I apply to Hinduism. I no more defend on the mere ground of authority a single text in the Hindu scriptures than I can defend one from the *Quran*. Everything has to submit to the test of reason. Islam appeals to people because it appeals also to reason. And, in the long run, it will be found that any other method would land one in trouble. There are undoubtedly things in the world which transcend reason. We do not refuse to bring them on the anvil of reason, but they will not come themselves. By their very nature they defy reason.[15]

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I claim to understand enough of the *Quran* and the history of Islam to know that a multitude of interpreters have interpreted the *Quran* to suit their preconceived notions.... But I would like to say that even the teachings themselves of the *Quran* cannot be exempt from criticism. Every true scripture only gains by criticism. After all we have no other guide but our reason to tell us what may be regarded as revealed and what may not be. The early Mussalmans accepted Islam not because they knew it to be revealed, but because it appealed to their virgin reason. I suggest that intolerance of criticism, even of what one may prize as dear as life itself, is not conducive to the growth of public corporate life. Surely, Islam has nothing to fear from criticism even if it be unreasonable.[16]

The history of Islam, if it betrays aberrations from the moral height, has many a brilliant page. In its glorious days it was not intolerant. It commanded the admiration of the world. When the West was sunk in darkness, a bright star rose in the Eastern firmament and gave light and comfort to a groaning world. Islam is not a false religion. Let Hindus study it reverently and they will love it, even as I do. If it has become gross and fanatical here, let us admit that we have had no small share in making it so. If Hindus set their house in order, I have not a shadow of doubt that Islam will respond in a manner worthy of its past liberal traditions. The key to the situation lies with the Hindus. We must shed timidity or cowardice. We must be brave enough to trust, and all will be well.[17]

Islamic Culture

Q. Do you cherish Islamic culture, as you would cherish your own Hindu culture?

A. Of course, I do. I cannot do otherwise, as I believe Islam and other great religions to be as true as my own.

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India is the richer for the cultures that Islam and Christianity brought with them. I regard the present antagonisms as a passing phase.[18]

The distinctive contribution of Islam to India's national culture is unadulterated belief in the truth of the Brotherhood of Man for those who are nominally within its fold. In Hinduism, the spirit of brotherhood has become too much philosophized. Similarly, though philosophical Hinduism has no other god but God, it cannot be denied that practical Hinduism is not so emphatically uncompromising as Islam.[19]

The spirit of brotherhood is manifested in no other religion so much as in Islam. It is no doubt confined to Muslims. But Islam has been a downright leveller as no other religion has been. It would be much better if the followers of Islam say the whole world is a brotherhood.[20]

Islam Teaches Universal Brotherhood

I AM a life-long student of the world's religions. I have endeavoured to study the great religions of the world with the eyes of their followers and, therefore, have no difficulty in seeing that the spirit of brotherhood pervades Islam. I wish that brotherhood had not been confined to Muslims alone, as had been done by some. As I read the *Quran*, I felt that it was extended to the whole human race. I am seeking to realize such Universal Brotherhood.[21]

Islam, it is said, believes in the Brotherhood of Man. But it is not the brotherhood of Mussalmans only, but it is Universal Brotherhood. The *Allah* of Islam is the same as the God of Christians and the *Ishwara* of Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism, there are as many names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes, and little man has tried in his humble way to describe Mighty God by

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giving Him attributes, though He is above all attributes, Indescribable, Inconceivable, Immeasurable. Living faith in this God means acceptance of the Brotherhood of Mankind. It also means equal respect for all religions. If Islam is dear to you, Hinduism is dear to me and Christianity is dear to the Christians. It would be the height of intolerance—and intolerance is a species of violence—to believe that your religion is superior to other religions and that you would be justified in wanting others to change over to your faith.[22]

A Passing Phase

I HAD a very good Mussalman client in South Africa. He is, alas, dead now. The relation of client and counsel developed into one of close companionship and mutual regard. We often had religious discussions. My friend, though not learned in any sense of the term, had an intellect as sharp as a razor. He knew everything of the *Quran*. He knew something of other religions also. He was interested in my accepting Islam. I said to him: "I can pay full respect to the *Quran* and the Prophet, why do you ask me to reject the *Vedas* and the incarnations? They have helped me to be what I am. I find the greatest consolation from the *Bhagavad Gita* and Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. I frankly confess that the *Quran*, the *Bible* and the other scriptures of the world, in spite of my great regard for them, do not move me as do the *Gita* of Krishna and the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas." The friend despaired of me and had no hesitation in saying that there must be something wrong with me. His, however, is not an exceptional case because I have since met many Mussalman friends who have held the same view. I do, however, believe that this is a passing phase. I share Justice Ameer Ali's view that Islam in the days of Harun-al-Rashid and Mamun was the most tolerant amongst the world's religions. But there

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was a reaction against the liberalism of the teachers of their times. The reactionaries had many learned, able and influential men amongst them and they very nearly overwhelmed the liberal and tolerant teachers and philosophers of Islam. We, in India, are still suffering from the effect of that reaction. But I have not a shadow of doubt that Islam has sufficient in itself to become purged of illiberalism and intolerance.[23]

Monotheism or Pantheism?

THERE is not one man in Hinduism who believes not in one God but in many. There is one God who is everywhere. Angels of God, manifestations of God, are infinite. God manifests Himself in endless ways. No Hindu believes in many Gods. But he will be told that his religion is pantheism and not monotheism. To me, the two are convertible terms. No Muslim believes that God is in the Seventh Heaven and nowhere else. I personally have not been able to make a distinction between monotheism and pantheism. But this is no ground for a quarrel between the communities. The fundamental difference is about idol worship. Hindus worship the stone as a symbol of God. Every Hindu house has such a symbol of worship. God is believed to be residing in it. The Hindu mind would see a unity between God and His symbol. This would offend the Muslim mind. The Muslim says: "The stone cannot be God.' He is right from his own point of view. But the Hindu says: 'There is God in this stone, and it is He whom I worship.' This appeals to my reason. But, in that sense, everything can be worshipped as God. Again, Islam permits no pictorial representation of God. The essential difference between the two lies here. To the Hindu, the picture or the idol is a sacred object. He feels offended when it is demolished. The so-called learned and well-educated among the two communities have set

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the Hindu and Muslim masses to quarrel. If they are told that all men are God's children, it would help in putting a stop to the quarrel. Apart from this, the two have so many things in common between them. Hindus and Muslims both are numerous in the country. It is impossible for either community to destroy or banish the other, or to present it with a choice between the sword and conversion. The Hindu mass mind won't take kindly to conversion. If I am able to wean the Muslims or Hindus from the error of conversion, they may give it up. Otherwise they may preach their own religions, but must not convert people by force of arms.[24]

No Forcible Conversions

I HAVE studied Islam. My Muslim friends in South Africa used to say to me: "Why not recite the *Kalma* and forget Hinduism?" I used to say in reply that I would gladly recite the *Kalma*, but forget Hinduism never. My respect and regard for Hazrat Mohammed was not less than theirs. But authoritarianism and compulsion is the way to corrupt religion, not to advance it.[25]

There is nothing in the *Quran* to warrant the use of force for conversion. The Holy Book says, in the clearest language possible: 'There is no compulsion in religion.' The Prophet's whole life is repudiation of compulsion in religion. No Mussalman, to my knowledge, has ever approved of compulsion. Islam would cease to be a world religion, if it were to rely upon force for its propagation.[26]

I have carefully studied, as much as I could in my busy life, Islam's history written by Muslim divines and I have not found a single passage in condonation of forcible conversion. Real conversion proceeds from the heart and a heart conversion is impossible without an intelligent grasp of one's own faith and that recommended for adoption.[27]

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What Religion Means

THE root of religion is 'that which binds'. The root meaning of its Sanskrit equivalent *Dharma* is 'that which holds'. It sustains a person as nothing else does. It is rock-bottom fundamental morality. When morality incarnates itself in a living man it becomes religion, because it binds, it holds, it sustains him in the hour of trial.[28]

Religion binds man to God and man to man. Does Islam bind Muslim only to Muslim and antagonize the Hindu? Was the message of the Prophet peace only for and between Muslims, and war against Hindus or non-Muslims? Are Muslims to be fed with this which I can only describe as poison? Those who are instilling this poison into the Muslim mind are rendering the greatest disservice to Islam. I know that it is not Islam. I have lived with and among Muslims not for one day, but closely and almost uninterruptedly for twenty years. Not one Muslim taught me that Islam was an anti-Hindu religion.[29]

If religion is allowed to be, as it is, a personal concern and a matter between God and man, there are many dominating common factors between the two (Hindus and Muslims) which will compel common life and common action. Religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind them. It is a misfortune that today they are so distorted that they have become a potent cause of strife and mutual slaughter.[30]

Narrow View of Islam

Q. Don't you consider it wrong for you, a non-Muslim, to recite anything from the *Quran* or to couple Rama and Krishna with *Rahim* and *Karim*? It offends Muslim ears.

A. The objection gives me a painful surprise. I

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think that the objection betrays narrowness of mind. You should know that I have introduced the recital from the *Quran* through Bibi Raihana Tyebjee, a devoted Muslim with a religious mind. She has no political motive behind the proposal. I am no *Avatar*-man, as is suggested. I claim to be a man of God, humbler than the humblest man or woman. My object ever is to make Muslims better Muslims, Hindus better Hindus, Christians better Christians, Parsis better Parsis. I never invite anybody to change his or her religion. I think, therefore, that you will be glad to find that my religion is so expansive as to include readings from the religious scriptures of the world.[31]

A Plea for Understanding

THERE is a letter from a Muslim who describes himself as a *Sufi*. The purport is that, in his opinion, there is nothing common between Hinduism and Islam and that the two cannot be as if they are one. For, he argues that the Hindus do not believe in one and only God, but hold cows and goats as superior to man and believe in high and low; whereas Islam is a brotherhood in which there is no hierarchy and which believes in one God as *Allah*. In this, there is a caricature of Hinduism. There is no Hindu who puts animals, the cow and the goat, before man. But I submit that if anyone like me believes himself to be the lowest in God's creation, there is nothing wrong. It is a sign of true humility. I hold that every Hindu believes in one and only God. I admit that excrescences have grown round Hinduism and that its votaries have not always been true to Hinduism undefiled. It is, therefore, up to an impartial man to understand Hinduism as its votaries like me understand it, just as it is the duty of an impartial Hindu to understand Islam as a good Muslim understands it. This, I hold, is the safest rule of

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interpretation for any faith. Then, it would be found that all great religions spring from the same source and the fundamentals are common to them all.[32]

Mystics of Islam

ISLAM has given the world the mystics no less than Hinduism or Christianity. In these days, when religion masquerades as religion, it is well to remind ourselves of what the best minds of the religions of the world have thought and said. We must not, like the frog in the well, who imagines that the universe ends with the walls surrounding his well, think that our religion alone represents the whole truth, and all the others are false. A reverent study of the other religions of the world would show that they are equally true as our own, though all are necessarily imperfect.[33]

An understanding knowledge and respect for the great faiths of the world is the foundation of the theosophy – wisdom about God.[34]

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CHAPTER IX

DECLARATION OF MY FAITH

My Religion

I HAVE been asked by Sir S. Radhakrishnan to answer the following three questions:

(1) What is your Religion?

(2) How are you led to it?

(3) What is its bearing on social life?

My religion is Hinduism which, for me, is Religion of Humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me.

I take it that the present tense in the second question has been purposely used instead of the past. I am being led to my religion through Truth and Non-violence *i.e.*, love in the broadest sense. I often describe my religion as Religion of Truth. Of late, instead of saying 'God is Truth', I have been saying 'Truth is God', in order more fully to define my Religion. I used, at one time, to know by heart the thousand names of God which a booklet in Hinduism gives in verse form and which, perhaps, tens of thousands recite every morning. But, nowadays, nothing so completely describes my God as Truth. Denial of God we have known. Denial of Truth we have not known. The most ignorant among mankind have some truth in them. We are all sparks of Truth. The sum total of these sparks is indescribable, as-yet-Unknown-Truth, which is God. I am being daily led nearer to it by constant prayer.

The bearing of this religion on social life, is or has to be, seen in one's daily social contact. To be true to such religion, one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service of all life. Realization of Truth is im-

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possible without a complete merging of oneself in, and identification with, this limitless ocean of life. Hence, for me, there is no escape from social service, there is no happiness on earth beyond or apart from it. Social service here must be taken to include every department of life. In this scheme there is nothing low, nothing high. For, all is one, though we seem to be many.[1]

I Claim to be a Sanatani Hindu

I CLAIM to be a *Sanatani* Hindu. I take the root meaning of the word *Sanatana*. No one knows accurately the origin of the word 'Hindu'. The name is given to us and we have characteristically adopted it. Hinduism has absorbed the best of all the faiths of the world and in that sense it is not an exclusive religion. Hence, it can have no quarrel with Islam or its followers as unfortunately is the case today.[2]

Though my claim has not been accepted by those who call themselves orthodox Hindus, I persist in calling myself an orthodox Hindu. If orthodox Hinduism consists in dining or not dining with this man or that man, and touching this man and not touching that man, or in quarrelling with Mussalmans and Christians, then I am certainly not an orthodox Hindu. But if orthodox Hinduism can mean an incessant search after what Hinduism possibly can be, if orthodox Hinduism can mean an incessant striving to live Hinduism to the best of one's lights, then I do claim to be an orthodox Hindu. I am also an orthodox Hindu in the sense in which the author of the *Mahabharata*, the great Vyasa, would have it. He has said somewhere in the *Mahabharata* to this effect: 'Put Truth in one scale and all sacrifices whatever in the other; that scale which contains Truth will outweigh the one that contains all the sacrifices put together, not excluding *Rajasuya* and *Ashvamedha Yajna*.' And if the *Mahabharata* may be accepted

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as the fifth *Veda*, then I can claim to be an orthodox Hindu, because every moment of the twenty-four hours of my life I am endeavouring to follow Truth counting no cost as too great.[3]

I am a staunch Hindu, but my Hinduism teaches me equal regard for all religions.[4]

My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all that I know to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Truth is my religion and *Ahimsa* is the only way of its realization.[5]

Mine is a Broad Faith

IN SPITE of my being a staunch Hindu, I find room in my faith for Christian and Islamic and Zoroastrian teaching, and, therefore, my Hinduism *seems* to some to be a conglomeration and some have even dubbed me an eclectic. Well, to call a man eclectic is to say that he has no faith, but mine is a broad faith which does not oppose Christians,—not even a Plymouth Brother—, not even the most fanatical Mussalman. It is a faith based on the broadest possible toleration. I refuse to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds, because I try to see them from his point of view. It is that broad faith that sustains me. It is a somewhat embarrassing position, I know,—but to others, not to me!

I should love all the men,—not only in India but in the world,—belonging to the different faiths, to become better people by contact with one another; and if that happens, the world will be a much better place to live in than it is today. I plead for the broadest toleration, and I am working to that end. I ask people to examine every religion from the point of the religionists themselves. I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, *i.e.*, to be wholly Hindu, or wholly

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Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another.[6]

To the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs

I WARN the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs against entertaining any ill-will towards the Christians, who are a minority in India. Nor should they entertain any wish about converting them to Hinduism, Islam or Sikhism. I do not believe in such conversions. I want the Christians to be good Christians, the Muslims to be good Muslims, the Sikhs to be good Sikhs and the Hindus to be good Hindus under all circumstances. This, to me, is real conversion.

I have seen that in view of the fact that State patronage to Christianity or any other religion would not be given, 75% of the Churches in India would have to be closed down. Religion can never be served through money. The Christians should rejoice that an artificial prop is being removed. God is omnipresent. Our bodies are the real temples rather than buildings of stone. The best place for congregational worship for any religion, in my opinion, is in the open with the sky above as the canopy and Mother Earth below for the floor. Every individual is the protector of his own religion against the whole world.[7]

Nobody can keep our religion for us. Each one of us, man or woman, must be one's own defender. God, who has given us religion, has given also the power of defending it. Everyone has not the power to strike; all—the lame, the blind and the dumb—have the power to die.[8]

Religion is dear to me, and my first complaint is that India is becoming irreligious. Here I am not thinking of the Hindu and Mohammedan or the Zoroastrian religion, but of that Religion which underlies all religions.... I am not pleading for a continuance of religious superstitions.

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We will certainly fight them tooth and nail, but we can never do so by disregarding Religion.[9]

Religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.[10]

My Claim

I HAVE practised Hinduism from early childhood. My nurse had taught me to invoke Rama when I feared evil spirits. Later on, I had come in contact with Christians, Muslims and others and, after making a fair study of other religions, had stuck to Hinduism. I am as firm in my faith today as in my early childhood. I believe God would make me an instrument of saving the religion that I love, cherish and practise. In any case, one has to have constant practice and acquaintance with the fundamentals of religion before being qualified for becoming God's instrument.[11]

I consider myself as good a Muslim as I am a Hindu and, for that matter, I regard myself an equally good Christian or Parsi. That such a claim would be rejected and on some occasions has been rejected, I know. That, however, does not affect my fundamental position.[12]

I speak as a Hindu having a living faith in my own religion and I claim to be a better Hindu for claiming to be a good Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew even as I am a Hindu. I invite everyone to feel likewise.[13]

I claim to be a *Sanatani* Hindu and because the essence of Hinduism and, indeed, all religions is toleration, I claim that if I am a good Hindu, I am also a good Muslim and a good Christian. It is against the spirit of religion to claim superiority. Humility is essential to

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non-violence. Has not the Hindu scriptures said that God has a thousand names? Why may not *Rahim* be one of them? The *Kalma* merely praises God and acknowledges Mohammed as His Prophet. I have no hesitation in praising God and acknowledging Mohammed as a Prophet, in the same way as I acknowledge Buddha and Zoroaster and Jesus.[14]

Need of Mutual Toleration

Q. You have now given the *Kalma* a place in the *Ashram*. What further remains to be done to kill your Hinduism?

A. I am confident that my Hinduism and that of the other *Ashram* Hindus has grown thereby. There should be in us an equal reverence for all religions. Badshah Khan,* whenever he comes, joins in the worship here with delight. He loves the tune to which the *Ramayana* is sung, and he listens intently to the *Gita*. His faith in Islam has not lessened thereby. Then, why may I not listen to the *Quran* with equal reverence and adoration in my heart?

Vinoba and Pyarelal studied Arabic and learnt the *Quran* in jail. Their Hinduism has been enriched by this study. I believe that Hindu-Muslim unity will come only through such spontaneous mingling of hearts and no other. Rama is not known by only a thousand names. His names are innumerable, and He is the same whether we call Him *Allah, Khuda, Rahim, Razzak*, Breadgiver, or any name that comes from the heart of a true devotee.[15]

The true Hindu sees Truth in every religion. The Hindu religion is a great religion and has infinite toleration in it and powers of absorption. God is everywhere. He is the ruler of men's hearts. He only wants single-

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* Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan.

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minded worship in whatsoever form it be and whatsoever language. It is, therefore, wholly un-Hindu and irreligious to object to the great verse from the *Quran Sharif* being recited.

How can it be a sin to chant God's name in Arabic? I implore Hindus not to degrade Hinduism by not understanding their immortal scriptures. Everyone should be at liberty to pray as he likes.[16]

Why I Call Myself a Muslim

WHY do I call myself a Muslim? Why do I consider that there is no difference between Rama and *Rahim*? Why have I gone so far as to say that I have no objection to reciting the *Kalma*?

It is because I am a *Sanatani* Hindu that I claim to be a Christian, a Buddhist and a Muslim. Some Muslim friends feel that I have no right to read Arabic verses from the *Quran*, but such do not know that true religion transcends language and scripture. I do not see any reason why I should not read the *Kalma*, why I should not praise *Allah* and why I should not acclaim Mohammed as His Prophet. I believe in all the great prophets and saints of every religion. I would continue to ask God to give me the strength not to be angry with my accusers, but to be prepared even to die at their hands without wishing them ill. I claim that Hinduism is all-inclusive and I am sure that, if I live up to my convictions, I would have served not only Hinduism but Islam also.[17]

One friend has asked me to explain the Sanskrit *Shloka* which says that he who sees God everywhere and in everything and sees all in God—that is to say, in every scripture and in every person of every religion—God is always for that person. God is never tired of him and he is always with God. If put in that way, it would be easy for everyone to understand what I mean when I say

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that I am a *Sanatani* Hindu, but it is not right to call myself a Muslim.

I maintain that what I have said is correct and that I am not ashamed to say that because I claim to be a *Sanatani* Hindu, I am a Muslim too.

The second correspondent asks that if both *Rahim* and Rama are names of God, why use the two? Would not only Rama suffice? God is supposed to have a thousand names in the Hindu scriptures. What if He had 40 crores of names? It is open to everyone to call Him by as many names as he wants to for his spiritual satisfaction.[18]

Teaching of the Sikh Gurus

GURU NANAK says that God may be called by the name of *Allah, Rahim* and so on. The name does not matter if He is enshrined in our hearts. Guru Nanak's efforts, like those of Kabir, have been directed towards synthesizing the various religions.[19]

Man calls God by many names—Rama, *Khuda* etc. Some go on a pilgrimage and bathe in the sacred river, others go to Mecca; some worship Him in temples, others in mosques; some just bow their heads in reverence; some read the *Vedas,* others the *Quran;* some dress in blue, others in white; some call themselves Hindus, others Muslims. Nanak says that he who truly follows God's law, knows His secret. This teaching is universal in Hinduism.[20]

The Tenth *Guru,* (of the Sikhs) has said that it matters little how, where or by what name man worships God. He is the same for everyone and, what is more, man is the same, *i.e.,* he is of the same genus. Guru Govind Singh says that humanity cannot be differentiated. Individuals differ in temperament or appearance, but all are built in the same mould. They have the same feelings. They all die and are mingled with the dust. Air and sun are the same for all men. The Ganga would not refuse

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her refreshing waters to a Muslim. Clouds shower their rain on all alike. It is unregenerate man alone who differentiates between himself and his fellow.[21]

There is so much in common between man and man that it is a marvel that there could be any quarrel on the ground of religion. Any creed or dogma which coerces others into following one uniform practice is a religion only in name, for a religion worth the name does not admit of any coercion. Anything that is done under coercion has only a short lease of life. It is bound to die.[22]

Two wrongs do not make one right. The essence of Guru Nanak's teaching is tolerance and Hindu-Muslim unity. A friend has written to me that Guru Govind Singh had several Muslim disciples and he protected them. Though the Tenth *Guru* had taken to the sword, he used it only against perpetrators of wrong and to protect the innocent and the weak.[23]

India has given birth to Guru Nanak who taught love and tolerance for all. The Sikhs are to be friends with the Hindus, the Muslims and everybody. It is wrong to make a difference between the Sikhs and the Hindus. Who is Guru Nanak, if not a Hindu? The *Guru Granth* is full of the teachings of the *Vedas*. Hinduism is like a mighty ocean which receives and absorbs all religious truths. It is a tragedy that India and the Hindus seem to have forgotten their heritage.[24]

Secret of Rama Raj

MY Hinduism teaches me to respect all religions. In that lies the secret of *Rama Raj*.[25]

All religions teach men to be good and peaceful. Intolerance is the negation of religion.[26]

The *Gita*, the *Quran*, the *Bible* the *Granth Saheb* and the *Zend Avesta* contain gems of wisdom, although the followers might belie their teachings.[27]

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The essence of true religious teaching is that one should serve and befriend all. I learnt this in my mother's lap. You may refuse to call me a Hindu. I know no defence except to quote a line from Iqbal's famous song: *Majhab nahin sikhata apasmen ber rakhna* (मज़हब नहीं (सिखाता आपस में बैर रखना) meaning religion does not teach us to bear ill-will towards one another. It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy, is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business.[28]

Religion teaches us to return good for evil.[29]

India's Spiritual Heritage

INDIA of the near future stands for perfect toleration of all religions. Her spiritual heritage is simple living and high thinking. I consider Western Christianity in its practical working a negation of Christ's Christianity. I cannot conceive Jesus, if he was living in the flesh in our midst, approving of modern Christian organizations, public worship or modern ministry. If Indian Christians will simply cling to the *Sermon on the Mount*, which was delivered not merely to the peaceful disciples but a groaning world, they would not go wrong, and they would find that no religion is false, and that if all live according to their lights and in the fear of God, they would not need to worry about organizations, forms of worship and ministry. The Pharisees had all that, but Jesus would have none of it, for they were using their office as a cloak for hypocrisy and worse. Co-operation with forces of Good and non-co-operation with forces of Evil are the two things we need for a good and pure life, whether it is called Hindu, Muslim or Christian.[30]

After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that:

(1) all religions are true;

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(2) all religions have some error in them;

(3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, inasmuch as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives.

My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith.[31]

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GLOSSARY

Adam : The first man.
Adhikara : Right or qualification.
Adishankar : The first Shankaracharya.
Advaita : Non-duality; absolute monoism.
Advaitism : Doctrine of Non-duality.
Agiari : A place of Fire-worship for the Parsis; a synagogue.
Ahimsa : Non-violence; love.
Allah : God.
Anasakti : Non-attachment.
Aparigraha : Non-possession.
Asakti : Attachment.
Ashram : A hermitage; a retreat or home for community living.
Ashrama : One of the four stages of life *viz.*, student's, householder's, forest-dweller's and that of a recluse.
Ashawamedha Yajna : A horse-sacrifice.
Asteya : Non-stealing.
Atman : Soul; spirit; self.
Avarna : An outcaste; an untouchable.
Avatar : An incarnation of God.

Bhagavat : A Hindu mythological book dealing with the life and teachings of Lord Krishna.
Bhajans : Religious songs; hymns.
Bhakti : Devotion.
Bhangi : A sweeper; a scavenger.
Bhaya : Fear; peril.
Brahma : Creator of the world in Hindu mythology; God.
Brahmachari : One who observes *Brahmacharya;* a celibate.
Brahmacharya : Celibacy; continence; self-restraint.
Brahmin : A member of the highest caste among the Hindus.

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Chandala : An outcaste; one who belongs to the lowest caste among the Hindus.

Dharma : Religion; duty; law.
Dharmashala : A caravanserai; a guest-house.

Gayatri : A Vedic prayer addressed to the Sun.
Grihasthashrama : Life of a householder.
Guru : A teacher; a moral preceptor.

Ishwara : Lord of the Universe; God.
Itihasas : Histories.

Kalma : A Muslim formula of prayer: "*La ilaha illa Allah, Mohammed Rasul Allah*" meaning there is no God but *Allah*, and Mohammed is the prophet of *Allah*.
Kamadhenu : The Cow of Plenty; fulfiller of all desires.
Karim : The Merciful; God.
Karma : Action.
Khuda : God.

Kshatriyas : Members of the warrior caste among the Hindus.
Mahabharata : A great Hindu Epic.
Mahatma : A great soul.
Manava Dharma : The religion or law for mankind.
Mandir : A temple.

Mantra : A sacred verse or formula.
Manusmriti : The Code of Laws written by the sage Manu
Maulvi : One who is well-versed in Muslim scriptures.
Moksha : Salvation; liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Nirvana : Utter extinction of egoism, self.
Niyams : Casual virtues like bodily purity, contentment, forbearance, study of scriptures, resignation to the will of God.

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Pandit : A learned Hindu.
Pariah : An untouchable; an outcaste.
Puranas : Books of Hindu mythology.

Rahim : The Merciful; God.
Rajasuya Yajna : A great sacrifice performed by a Hindu monarch at the time of his coronation to establish his unchallenged supremacy.
Ramayana : A great Hindu Epic.
Rishi : a seer; a sage.

Sanatana : Ancient; eternal.
Sanatana Dharma : Ancient or orthodox religion.
Sanatani or Sanatanist : A follower of orthodox religion.
Sannayas : Renunciation of worldly interests and pursuits.
Sannayasi : A recluse.
Satya : Truth.
Savarna Hindus : Caste-Hindus.
Shastras : Religious scriptures of the Hindus.
Shastris : Learned in the Hindu scriptures.
Shlokas : Verses.
Shruti : The *Vedas*.
Shuddhi : Literally means purification; conversion to Hindu religion.
Shudra : A member of the labour caste among the Hindus.
Simurgh : A phoenix.
Smritis : Ancient Hindu law books.
Sufi : A Muslim mystic.
Swaraj : Self-rule; independence.

Tabligh : A propaganda for conversion to Muslim religion.

Upanishads : Ancient philosophical writings of the Hindus.

Vaishnava : Belonging to the Vishnu sect among the Hindus.

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Vaishya : A member of the trader class among the Hindus.

Vanaprastha : The third stage of life, according to the Hindus, that of a forest-dweller.

Varna : Literally means colour; a class; a caste.

Varnashrama : Division of Hindu society into four castes (*Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Shudra*) and four stages of life (student's, householders', forest-dweller's and that of a recluse).

Vedas : The earliest sacred scriptures of the Hindus.

Yajna : Literally means worship; hence sacrifice; hence any sacrificial act or any act of service.

Yamas : Cardinal virtues like Non-violence, Truth, Non-stealing, Celibacy and Non-possession.

Yoga : Primarily it means joining or union; profficiency in performance of action.

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ALL RELIGIONS ARE TRUE

"I BELIEVE that all the great religions of the world are true more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything that the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable.

"I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed.

"And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another"

—M. K. GANDHI

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